

## **Pax Christi International Reiterates Call for a Comprehensive Middle East Peace Process**

1. Pax Christi International calls for immediate international efforts towards a new, just and comprehensive peace process in the Middle East. This call is made after consulting participants from the member and partner organisations present at the Pax Christi Third Regional Consultation for the Middle East<sup>1</sup>, and representing different background and opinions. It reiterates the statement of Pax Christi International to the UN that was issued immediately after the July 2006 War.<sup>2</sup>

2. The situation in the Middle East today is fragile. Conflicts and the threat of more violence and war are dominating the region and beyond. The challenges and unresolved issues are enormous. Civilians, especially the poorest and weakest, lack the protection that they are entitled to under International Humanitarian Law.

3. Against the background of escalating conflicts and of polarisation and violent rhetoric, we still see signs of hope. With many others, we believe it is "1 minute to 12" and that if no action is taken now, the region will face a wave of stronger and prolonged violence that might spill over beyond the region. Therefore we strongly call on all parties to act NOW, with utmost responsibility and conscience, towards a comprehensive peace, for the sake of our future generations.

### ***Why now?***

4. The absence of a genuine political peace process and continuation of double standards as well as the lack of commitment from the international community and conflicting parties has led to a situation where violence, paralysis, polarisation and chaos have increased. The region has again become the battlefield of greater geo-political struggles of a regional and global level.

5. Today, we are witnessing the most appalling violence in Iraq. Civilians, and amongst them increasingly intellectuals and peaceful activists, are deliberately targeted by armed groups. The inability to end the bloodshed and ensure the unity of the country are a worrying signal to the rest of the region.

6. The Palestinian people are being strangled and exhausted. This is caused by the ongoing Israeli occupation, military operations in and the blockade of Gaza as well as the continuing construction of the separation wall and settlement expansion in the West Bank. The international boycott of the Hamas government has mainly hit the civilian population and

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting in Cyprus, 8-11 December 2006

<sup>2</sup> "Message of Pax Christi International to the United Nations Calling for a New Peace Process in Middle East", Brussels, 18 August 2006, ME.82.E.06. Read in English, French and Spanish at [www.paxchristi.net](http://www.paxchristi.net)

discredited the international community in the eyes of the population. In Israel, the government has no clear policy after its failure in the Lebanon war of last July. Lebanon's civil infrastructure was destroyed during that war and a struggle for power is going on which is closely related to the role of various external powers in the country.

7. The July War ended with a cessation of hostilities according to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701. However, that was a transitional resolution that leaves many key issues unresolved. In order to reach a durable solution, these issues must be addressed in a comprehensive way.

However, our hope stems from the opportunities that are in front of us and that we should grasp:

8. Although we have witnessed a "diplomatic vacuum" over the past period, since the war between Israel and Hizbollah, the international community has woken up and in Europe especially there is willingness to become more involved in solving the conflict. This willingness should be addressed to engage the US and Israel as well.

9. The Arab League has re-launched its peace initiative of 2002. The chances that were missed when the initiative was first launched should now be taken, since the plan offers a workable basis for a comprehensive regional peace.

10. There is a momentum for Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. The Syrian authorities have indicated they are ready and influential Israelis have also urged their government to engage with Syria. Without solving the conflict between Israel and Syria, based on the return of the Golan, there will be no comprehensive peace in the region.

11. Over the years, a common understanding has been built in the region and around the world about the core principles of peace in the Middle East: Firstly, the concept of land for peace that will provide peace between the Arab countries and Israel in exchange for a return of all the territories occupied in 1967; Secondly, a consensus has been built accepting the two-state solution based on the borders before June 1967.

### ***Outline of a New Peace Process***

12. Pax Christi's Middle East Consultation participants emphasise the need of convening a Madrid II Conference for Security and Cooperation, as real peace must be built, not one that is manifested only in the absence of war. Such a Conference offers an opportunity to begin a new and holistic peace process in the region with a clear agreed on destination. This conference should develop mechanism to increase a regional understanding and guarantees respect for human rights and human security.

13. The agenda of peace negotiations has to be clear from the beginning. Key issues such as borders, water, refugees and the status of Jerusalem should be on top of the agenda and no longer postponed.

14. All parties to the various conflicts should participate in a process of dialogues that listens to all political parties, including Hamas and Hezbollah, and take into account the legitimate concerns of all states involved. Isolation has proven to be counterproductive.

15. Next, the role of politicians who must listen to their people. There is an important role in such a process for civil society and religious leaders. Peace building also requires a “bottom-up” project. A peace agreement which is imposed upon the people will not work.

16. The unresolved Palestinian issue is the major source of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. Consequently any solutions or efforts to build peace in this region would be only partial and short term, should the issue of the ongoing dispossession of the Palestinian people remain unresolved and their right to self-determination unimplemented. Therefore it is crucial that the Palestinian refugees, who constitute the majority of the Palestinian people, be represented in negotiations. Their rights, as well as those of the Palestinians inside Israel, should be ensured.

17. The Quartet has lost its credibility by its inability to get a peace process off the ground. However, it represents the key international players. It could be reinforced by including a representative from the Arab world, e.g. Saudi Arabia that launched the Arab Initiative and another member acceptable to the different parties, e.g. Turkey. Such a strong third party is necessary in order to ensure that negotiations take place and agreements are implemented.

18. Regarding Iraq: we call for renewed international efforts to address the issues of human security, refugees and displaced persons and the absence of stability and rule of law. This should entail the involvement of relevant regional actors and international actors, including the neighbouring countries like Iran, Turkey and Syria, notably the UN and EU. The parties should commit to international agreed upon legal and moral principles, including mutual respect for sovereignty. The process of restoring rule of law, developing a legitimate government and national reconciliation on all levels should receive priority.

19. Finally, more international efforts have to be made to work towards the creation of a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East. The UN, as well as the European Union and other intergovernmental bodies, should play an active role in a process of dialogue and mediation.

Larnaca, 11 December 2006

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