

Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions

The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (*Justice and Peace Europe*) was founded in 1971 by 11 national Justice and Peace commissions – Belgium (Fr), Germany, England & Wales, France, Ireland, Luxemburg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland and Spain. It was born out of the conviction that to cooperate will achieve more to further development, justice and peace than to work only as individual commissions. Today *Justice and Peace Europe* has grown to a network of 31 national Justice and Peace Commissions, and includes also the Albanian, Austrian, Belgian (Flanders), Bosnian, Croatian, Danish, Scottish, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Czech, Romanian, Serbian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Swedish and Ukrainian commissions.

All these commissions are mandated by their Bishops' Conferences to speak out on poverty fighting, Human Rights, peace, reconciliation and development. In order to become a member of *Justice and Peace Europe* a national commission has to be recognized and/or established by its national Bishops' Conference.

Exchanges and meetings

Justice and Peace Europe promotes exchanges and meetings, and the mutual understanding among the European Justice and Peace commissions and the local churches. Thus it takes an active part in the process towards a more unified Europe.

Every year two meetings are held. In March all the *Secretaries General* meet during three days to discuss common issues and to prepare the *General Assembly*. This Assembly is held in September. All decisions concerning *Justice and Peace Europe* are taken then. The Assembly is preceded by the *International Study Days* during which one topic is being worked on under different aspects during three days. The topic for the study days is connected to the theme chosen by the current presidency. It aims at reflecting the situation in the country where they are held, and lets the participants encounter partners active in the situation being studied.

In 2006 the study days were held in Belfast, and the members of *Justice and Peace Europe* were able to meet the parties in the conflict in Northern Ireland and learn about their work for reconciliation and peace. In 2007 the study days were held in Kiev, and the participants met a number of organizations active in the difficult process of remembering a difficult and divided past in order to build a common future together. And in 2008 they were held in Belgrade, and the participants met with the Serb, Croat and Albanian communities.

During the now ongoing French presidency this theme is "*Europe as a Project of Solidarity*", and the upcoming study days in September 2009 will take place in Seville. They will focus on the issues of migration and poverty, and highlight the efforts to overcome the problems connected with the third and fourth world.

Concerted actions

Every year *Justice and Peace Europe* launches a concerted action on one particular issue and on a European level. This issue is decided upon by the General Assembly, and the action itself is being worked out by a preparatory group. All commissions then carry out the actual action in their particular national contexts in a given and common time frame.

In 2007 the concerted action centred on the demand that the countries ratify the UN convention on the rights of migrant workers and their families. Also in 2007 another action aimed at changing the European code of conduct for the sale of arms into a legal binding instrument. In 2008 the commissions spoke up for the poor by reminding the governments of their pledges to the Millennium Development Goals. In connection with this plea a catalogue of art works was put together with artists from 26 European countries. A number of these works was presented in the exhibition "*Poverty Has a Face*" in the Council of Europe in January 2009. The exhibition was inaugurated by Mr Terry Davis, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. And this year the concerted action calls on the countries to fight the ever growing plague of trafficking in human beings.

Bilateral and multilateral cooperation

By promoting the exchange between the European commissions *Justice and Peace Europe* contributes to advance bilateral and multilateral cooperation among the commissions. The Conference encourages the commissions to intensify their trans-national and trans-regional cooperation, and also encourages them to inform the other members of their respective activities.

An example of multilateral cooperation is the work on the "Great Lakes region" carried out by the Swiss, Dutch and Belgian (Flanders) commissions.

Presence at the Council of Europe

The exhibition in the Council of Europe was made possible by the fact that *Justice and Peace Europe* is recognized by this organization as an International NGO (INGO) since 2001. As such it enjoys, together with the other recognized INGOs, a "participatory status". The main interest for *Justice and Peace Europe* to be present at the Council of Europe is to participate in the work of the Human Rights committee of the INGOs. The representative of *Justice and Peace Europe* publishes a newsletter on the topics of interest for the member commissions on www.juspax-eu.org, and functions as a contact between the commissions and the Council which is one of the most important Human Rights organizations in Europe.

The members of *Justice and Peace Europe* are bound together by ties of mutual solidarity. By their joint activities, they bear witness to the shared Christian hope for a just world and a united Europe.