

Pax Christi International Meets in Arras 19–21 April 2018

by
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Arras is a town of approximately 40,000 people in the north of France.

This is also the town that was the site of the Battle of Arras, a major British military offensive in the First World War. There is evidence of the War all over, including strikingly a devastated part of the Cathedral preserved as it is for future generations. A century after the War, it was very symbolic that Pax Christi International (PCI) and representatives of Pax Christi from around the world met in Arras to ponder and act on ways of effecting peace and peacefulness in a contemporary world that is so different today, given, for instance, technological advances with the means of war.

What follows are a few highlights of what to me was an affirming yet strategic 3-day meeting, that included discussions of PC work and the PCI AGM. They should give a clear sense of the directions of PCI and the global PC network.

Pax Christi in the world

Those representatives of national Pax Christi groups (called ‘Sections’) that were able to attend - some could not due to logistical and other reasons – shared their work with us. It was an impressive range of involvement, spurred by concern for peace and human dignity articulated in the PC mandate and priorities carried out in specific contexts and settings.

PC UK was active on several fronts, especially the ‘Peace Sunday’ activities in parishes, schools, and elsewhere that also contributed £102,000 towards PC UK. This comprised various initiatives such as ‘Peace Awards’ to recognise the contribution of significant individuals, producing resources, engaging the Church and ecumenically (87+ workshops), challenging schools to imagine ‘what a Peace School would like’, promoting the Nuclear Bans Treaty, and so on. *PC Ireland* focused on the destructive role autonomous robot weapons will play in the future.

The *Netherlands PC*, having amalgamated with the Justice and Peace Commission to be known as just **Pax**, works through a much larger staff who enable an extensive peace and capacity building programme in 14 conflict-affected countries in Africa and the Middle East. There is also a programme of education, advocacy, lobbying and public events under an overall motif of “Peace: Are you in it?” in the country itself, further backed up by support and volunteer groups, including the 75 ‘embassies of peace’. *PC Peru* spotlighted the extensive damage to their country 83% of which was given over to mining in one form or the other, with BHP Billiton especially mentioned unfavourably. *PC Germany* integrated its programme within a framework of ‘NonViolence matters. What Non-Violence looks like.’ It benefited from the commitment of 135 active volunteer groups. Almost all countries were supported by volunteer groups.

Though this is by no means an exhaustive account of what is going in several parts of the world in the name of PC, it nevertheless gives an insight into the involvement of the PC global network. Unfortunately, a common thread, that ran through the reports was the reality of ageing, and the difficulty of attracting younger audiences. It was also clear that, unlike in Australia and New Zealand, almost all Sections enjoyed varying levels of staffing support.

The report on Australia and New Zealand was well received. I could not help but get the impression that most were impressed by the extent of engagement in Australia and New Zealand without any staffing. (In a lighter vein, the graphics of kangaroos and a kiwi bird at the end of our power points brought the house down!) What was inspiring was that even though PCI is really one office (secretariat) with a limited number of staff they enact a remarkable assortment of initiatives (see later). They work together with the efforts of the various Sections around the world depicted a thriving PC committed to making a meaningful contribution towards a better and more peaceful world. A few accomplishing much!

Advocacy

Advocacy lies at the heart of PC's presence in the world. The four main priorities of PCI are:

1. Israel-Palestine Peace Process:

Among a long list of actions, this has involved

- Work and coordination with relevant members and partners, in Palestine, appropriate structures in the Vatican, and elsewhere;
- Collaborating ecumenically with the World Council of Churches (WCC) responding to '50 years of Occupation' (since 1967) and supporting Christian religious organisations in Palestine,
- Lobby meetings, discussions for stronger action with EU, UN bodies including UNHCR, et al, who can influence agendas and the ground reality.

2. The UN Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons (UNTPNW):

- Contributed to the effort that culminated in the Nobel Peace Prize;
- Side events organised during UN Treaty deliberations/negotiations;
- Helped formulate the text of the Treaty, including successfully arguing with other agencies for the inclusion of 5 stronger articles in the Treaty;
- Sent a 8-person delegation to the Vatican International Disarmament Conference of experts last year to contribute, and return with ideas and insights for dissemination and action within the PC family and beyond.

3. Catholic Non-Violence Initiative (CNI):

- Panel discussions organised in New York and Brussels,
- SDGs training organised in Manila,
- Published papers with COMECE and Justice and Peace Europe for the UN Meeting on Resilience,
- Meetings and exchanges with policy makers promoting NonViolence. (See later on CNI Working and Research Groups)

4. Extractives in Latin America:

- Working Group of members from America and Europe;
- Position paper on mining published with specific calls and challenges to the international community;
- Panel discussions and alliance building with CIDSE, COMECE, EEAS;
- Provision of training.

Ad Hoc priorities included:

- Syria, and the Korean situation;
- A representation was made at the UN Biological Weapons meeting;

- Promoting PC positions on specific international concerns in the Council of Europe, taking advantage of the Vatican's Observer status, and through membership of the Conference of International NGOs;
- Encouraging academic groups to focus on scientific analyses that demonstrate non-violence achieves better outcomes than violence, or the benefits of diverting some of the resources from military objectives to social expenditures.

Youth Engagement in PC: Promoting Intergenerational Conversations

Attention is given to developing and equipping the younger generation. Some highlights include

- *Young Peace Journalists*: young journalists given opportunities to write peace stories. Videos made of such stories. Details on PC Website.
- *Consultation in Kenya on Non- Violence Peace Initiatives in April 2018 for young people* (Worth replicating in Asia?)
- *PC In Germany*: Students' forum for groups in universities conducted by youths enrolled in peace and conflict studies; and young interns approaching youth groups.

Catholic Non-Violence Initiative (CNI)

This is a follow-up to the 2016 Conference on *Non-Violence and Just Peace* that took place in the Vatican under the aegis of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace and was co-sponsored by PCI. The Objective is to help develop Catholic Social teaching (some of which is also used ecumenically); integrate Gospel nonviolence into the life of the Church; initiate conversation on nonviolence; moving from Just War to Just Peace. Five **international working groups** of theologians and other experts have been appointed to study and explore different aspects of Just Peace such as Foundational Theology of Non-Violence, Biblical Foundations of NonViolence, and Integrating Gospel Non-Violence into Church structures at every level. To undergird this, a further **five research groups** are studying related topics such as Climate change, the Environment and Non-Violence, Women and Non-Violence, and Non-Violence in Christian and other faith traditions.

The drafts will inform a Conference on Just Peace sometime early next year (2019). The final document will be submitted to the Vatican as a basis/material, hopefully, for an Encyclical on Non-Violence and Just Peace, however worded, and the climate for this is positive. If it did eventuate, one only has to recall the global impact of *Laudato Si'*.

PCI World Assembly in 2020

This gathering will be a major landmark as PC looks to its Peacebuilding mandate and role in the future years leading to 2030 and beyond. The year 2020 is significant being the 75th Anniversary of the dropping of the bomb, and of the beginning of PC. The dates of the Assembly are set at **Saturday 16 May – Sunday 24 May, 2020**. It will be held in the International Conference Hall situated in front of the Peace Museum in Peace Park. The number attending this Assembly is estimated to 'scale up' to 75/80 and more. The Japan Justice and Peace Commission has been designated a Partner of PCI in this Assembly. Religious and secular agencies/foundations are being approached to find funds to enable participation from the Third World. As we look forward to 2020, we need to ask ourselves what kind of Assembly do we wish to have?

2020-2030 Strategy

The sustainability of PCI and sections will be paramount in future deliberations. Depending on the budget, a well-qualified, external Consultant will be appointed to help articulate a Vision for PC towards 2030 to be relevant as a peace movement for the times ahead. While the past surveys have been very useful, now there is a need to look anew at PC, as a vibrant, global

network with member Sections making strong contributions to a dynamic future. It needs to link local and international action, to take cognizance of an evolving world where the Asia-Pacific, Africa and Latin America are throwing up new challenges. PC needs to respond to a changing global context, to examine its leadership and structures. **It should have a greater focus on the Asia- Pacific region.**

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