



Pax Scotia

Issue 54

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the Scottish visit



Fr Michael Hutson is Parish Priest of St Mary's, Benbecula. As a member of the Board of SCIAF, he visited Colombia last June. He is pictured here in Choco with Fr Johnnie

It is **the** commandment of Jesus Christ that we love our neighbour. Providing opportunities for the poorest of the poor to achieve their God-given dignity has been SCIAF's labour of love for exactly 60 years. This year, our work in South America is the focus of the Lent Campaign.

The Republic of Colombia, population 52 million, is a beautiful blend of Caribbean and Pacific coast, modern cities, rainforest jungle, highlands, grasslands and desert. The people are friendly and full of fun. But the country has a past and recent history that has left considerable chaos. Inevitably, the poorest bear the biggest impact.

For decades, civil war inflicted violence and suffering on Colombia. Guerrillas, private armed groups, the cocaine industry, government corruption and neglect caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands. Nearly 7 million became homeless. The largest armed group - FARC - is now integrated into the government. But the struggle for peace is not over. Displacement, disorder and the threat of violence continue to be a problem for many. The production and transportation of cocaine (consumed in places like Scotland, by the way), the trafficking of people and arms, the activity of dissident armed groups, the loss and damage effects of climate change, illegal gold mining: they all result in danger, trauma and death even today.

In the midst of all this, good men and women stand up for what is right. They hunger and thirst for the justice that will bring peace to the people of Colombia. These local heroes often suffer for the stand they take. The church in Colombia is strongly in solidarity with their mission of hope. By supporting SCIAF, the people of Scotland play a small but significant part in this frontline promotion of Gospel values. An important example of this is in the Colombian rainforest.

Chocó is a dense jungle on the Pacific coast. It is populated by small number of indigenous people and a greater number who are descended from African slaves whose ancestors either escaped into the jungle or who went there after

Peacemakers -

will be called "children of God"

emancipation in 1851. They had nowhere else to go. They won liberation but were then trapped in an environment where no one else wanted to live: think swamps, snakes, disease, bugs. But they made the most of it and - in their own way - thrived. But it's a scandal that, in addition to all the chaos listed above, the people of Chocó are still neglected in terms of roads, sanitation, proper electricity, schools, healthcare. During our time there a baby died for want of simple post-natal care; a tragedy both deeply personal and illustrative of the greater challenges.

Yet, they overcome trauma with hope.

When I visited them, I was constantly being thanked for the prayers and practical support provided by the people of Scotland. The "accompaniment" we provide was often the thing for which they expressed real gratitude.

Local clergy and diocesan staff, the women who run their own sausage factory, youth club leaders who use surfing and rugby to promote positive life values for traumatised children, community activists trained for empowerment in promoting human rights, mums and dads who just want safety and opportunities for their kids: they all said thanks to the people of Scotland.

Through SCIAF we are involved in peacemaking in Colombia. As we commit ourselves to our WEE BOX Campaign for Colombia this year, we can take inspiration from Pope Francis's prayer for the Year of Hope: "May the Jubilee remind us that those who are peacemakers will be called 'children of God' (Mt 5:9)"

Michael Hutson

SCIAF's Holy Land Crisis Appeal can be accessed at <https://www.sciaf.org.uk/get-involved/appeals/697-holy-land-crisis-appeal>.

You will find details of their work in Colombia at:

<https://www.sciaf.org.uk/our-work/countries/33-colombia>



Ahmed Miqdad (pictured right) is a teacher by profession, and a poet who is beginning to be published around the world, despite the difficulties he faces living in a tented camp in Gaza.

Marian Pallister is Pax Christi Scotland's chair.



Nothing has remained

The word “fragile” will continue to describe the situation in Gaza. We are aware how easily the ceasefire might be broken. We know that not only the politics of the region, but world politics add to the instability of this precarious mechanism that could – should – lead to peace.

Pope Francis has described war as a defeat. He has asked that the dignity of all be respected. We can only wonder at the fact that dignity still exists for people who have been subjected to what so many governments (but not Westminster or the White House) call genocide.

Over the past year or so, many of us have made links with people in Palestine. For me, that has mainly been through very regular online meetings organised by Pax Christi International with colleagues in the West Bank and Gaza itself. Usama Nicola, for example, has not only given us detailed briefings during those precious and valuable times together, but has given his time to write for this publication.

How do we thank people like him, who continue to give while all is being taken from them?

Remember Fr Gabriel Romanelli, who came to Scotland last year? He spoke so movingly about the situation in his parish in Gaza – a parish from which he was barred for many months. I was privileged to interview him for Pax Christi International. Much more recently, we joined him on Zoom. It was before the ceasefire. He was

desperately cold – the Israelis had cut off the power – and I felt he was looking ill. But he continued to speak with hope, even though his parish had become, as he has described it, a church, a hospital, and a cemetery.

Sometimes, connections spring up through social media. It is sad to read the hatred that has been bred, sickening to see the vile comments that are posted in the wake of incidents of life and death.

But as someone who believes that poetry can express true feelings, dig deep into souls and situations, I began to follow poet Ahmed Miqdad.

I messaged Ahmed that I wanted to share this poem with you, here in these pages. He gave his permission. I rather stupidly asked if he would write an article for us. He politely explained that he was living in a tent without access to the internet. I pray there will be a time in the not-too-distant future when he is again able to share with us through his poetry Palestinians' struggle for peace and dignity..

For now, this father of three boys and a daughter – all living with Ahmed and his wife in that tent – is happy that I share this poem with you. He was a teacher before this devastation. He says he is volunteering now to teach students in his camp. Perhaps all that must change now as people move around Gaza, seeking loved ones, seeking the remains of homes.

What won't change is people like Ahmed trying “to make the world hear our voice”.

One of Pax Christi Scotland's main aims in 2025 is to go on making the world hear the voices of the oppressed; to use OUR voice to create a nonviolent world. Please join us, remembering all that has been endured by people like Ahmed and his children.

Marian Pallister

Nothing has remained

By Ahmed Miqdad

Everything has gone
The homes, the souls and feelings.
Our joyful summer became a frightening winter
With its long-darkened and terrifying nights.
The ghost of death eradicated our hearts
And stole our souls.
Our beautiful spring became a lifeless autumn
Our children fall like the leaves of the green trees,
So quietly with the breeze of death.
Their souls fly
As the hovering and glamorous butterflies
Lost in the vast universe
And increase the number
Of the shining stars.
Our feelings turned into a dry valley
And a burden desert
They're frozen as an ice bar.
We don't feel the loss
As it's numerous
And no feelings to joy
We're still alive
But nothing has remained.

Ahmed Miqdad

Ahmed's poetry written before the most recent situation is available on Amazon (& elsewhere):

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Literature-Fiction-Mr-Ahmed-Miqdad-Books/s?rh=n%3A62%2Cp_27%3AMr%2BAhm



Addressing Injustice & Inequality in the Hope of Peace

Delia Chatoor is our Pax Christi member in Trinidad and Tobago. She works with the International Red Cross & the Institute for International Criminal Investigations. Here she reflects on the Jubilee Year and its implications for the environment.



Delia Chatoor

The closing months of 2024 witnessed several major meetings related to environment issues, but even as efforts were being made to address the worsening climate crisis and the struggle to secure adequate funds directed to climate financing from developed to developing countries, a press release on December 2, 2024 from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute stated that “revenues from sales of arms and military service by the 100 largest companies in the industry reached \$632 billion in 2023, a real-terms increase of 4.2 per cent compared to 2022.”

Appeals to wealthy nations seem to be falling on deaf ears despite Pope Francis urging in May last year ahead of the Church’s 2025 Jubilee Year that “the more affluent nations... acknowledge the gravity of so many of their past decisions and determine to forgive the debts of countries that will never be able to repay them,” noting that such action was a “matter of justice.”

Linked to all the various initiatives is the repeated call for harmony with nature and on April 22 the UN will convene a one-day high-level meeting on Harmony with Nature and Living Well during the commemoration of Mother Earth Day. The UN once again stresses that “the well-being of humanity depends on the health and integrity of nature” and urged the international community to ensure that its policies make for “more sustainable and inclusive economies and societies with nature.”

Such action could be readily achieved through simple community-based programmes involving religious and secular groups. For example, in 2015 Christ the King Roman Catholic Church in San Fernando, Trinidad and Tobago introduced an Environmental Policy for the Community. One of their 12 Commitments includes the reduction of waste through “re-use and recycling and by using recycled materials whenever these are available, economical and suitable”.

Can we, as People of God and as individuals, recognise and appreciate that the Earth with its varied ecosystems is our Home and that we could determine its future? Can we see ourselves as pilgrims journeying together to solve challenges, build bridges, strive for justice, peace and kinship with the environment being key to all we want to achieve?

COP 30 will be convened in Bele’m, Brazil in November 2025, near the end of our Jubilee Year. The conference themes are imperative for the preservation of our common heritage. In his World Day of Peace message on January 1, 2025, Pope Francis reminded that “Each of us must feel in some way responsible for the devastation to the which the earth, our common home, has been subjected.”

And in the Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee Year 2025: *Spes Non Confundit*, Pope Francis writes “...the land belongs to me [God], and you are only strangers and guests of mine” (Leviticus 25:23). Accountability must be part and parcel of our belief systems and in the ways we opt to observe the Jubilee.

The message of the Jubilee should encourage us to make changes in our approach to how we treat the environment; how we address injustice and inequality; how we disburse natural and financial resources so that they benefit all humankind.

The physical impact on countries plagued by armed conflicts is impossible to quantify. How long will it take to recreate natural habitats, especially in developing countries?

Pope Francis repeated the call at the beginning of our Year of Grace to reduce or cancel the international debt which continues to threaten the future of so many vulnerable states. Conditionalities must not be attached when the dignity of millions is at stake.

As Pilgrims of Hope, we are encouraged to journey together in faith and move closer to God, the source of all that is good and pleasing. We are all interconnected - the rich and the developing countries - so the Jubilee should be “a holy thing”, when we witness the softening of hearts of stone into “hearts of flesh.” (Ezek.36:26).

Delia Chatoor

Our website

Blogs, podcasts, the book project, past and future events – these are all on our Pax Christi Scotland website. All newsletters are archived there. You can pay your annual membership fee on the Membership page and make donations. Please explore and share:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Continued thanks to webmaster Chris Boles of Caledonian Websites:

<https://www.caledonianwebsites.com/>

Membership Reminder

Please pay **in November** on the membership page of our website, or, if you pay by online banking, please give your name to identify your payment.

If you wish to pay by cheque, send to the address below, cheques payable to Pax Christi Scotland.

You can also make regular donations on our 'donate' page or by standing order - thank you.

Membership fees per annum are £10 for waged, £5 for unwaged.

Explore the website for all our activities:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Where to find Pax Christi Scotland:

<http://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

[https://www.facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/PaxChristiScotland)

[PaxChristiScotland](#)

[@PaxScotland](#)

Snail mail:

Pax Christi Scotland
c/o Xaverian Missionaries
Calder Avenue
Coatbridge ML5 4JS

YouTube Channel

You can find recordings of all our events at:

<https://www.youtube.com/>

[@paxchristiscot](#)

[land](#)

Click on the word 'Subscribed' and you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.

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Martha-Inés Romero - Pax Christi International Secretary General to visit Scotland

Martha-Inés Romero, Secretary General of Pax Christi International, has accepted our invitation to visit Scotland and to engage not only with Pax Christi Scotland but with agencies of the Church and civil society.



Our executive has organised a packed schedule, and we hope that Pax Christi Scotland members and friends will join us on what will essentially be a Lenten journey of hope. Here is the timetable:

Monday, March 3: Martha-Inés will speak at Glasgow University on the Importance of Peace Education and Adult Faith Formation followed by a Q&A.

Tuesday, March 4: Martha-Inés will deliver the 'Time for Reflection' at the Scottish Parliament.

Wednesday, March 5: Martha-Inés will attend the annual Ash Wednesday peace vigil at Faslane Nuclear Base.

Thursday, March 6: Martha-Inés will deliver the keynote speech at the Scottish Parliament at a conference for Catholic secondary school pupils on Pax Christi Peace building in Colombia. Colombia (her home country) is the focus of this year's SCIAF Lenten campaign. This event is supported by Pax Christi, SCIAF, the Scottish Bishops' Conference Justice and Peace Commission, and Justice for Colombia Scotland.

Friday, March 7- Saturday March 8: Martha-Inés will deliver the keynote speech at the Scottish Bishops' Interreligious Dialogue Committee Annual symposium and will be a member of discussion panels.

Sunday, March 9 - Tuesday, March 11: Martha-Inés will lead the Pax Christi Scotland gathering and retreat at the Conforti Centre In Coatbridge, along with other speakers. *'A Time for Reflection, Prayer, and Eucharist to explore the spirituality of Catholic Peacemaking in the 21st Century'*.

This residential event is subsidised by the Xaverians and Pax Christi Scotland and we would be grateful if members wishing to attend could register with anna@confortiinstitute.org by Friday, February 7, after which it will be advertised externally and open to non-members also.



The Pax Christ Scotland Book Project - the update

The Catholic Nonviolence initiative published *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace within the Church and the World* in 2020. The text explores how the Church can return to the tradition of Gospel nonviolence and, in doing so, enrich the world.

Pax Christ Scotland launched our online monthly reading group last November to study this inspirational text, led by Anna Blackman. The recording of each meeting can be accessed on our website (<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org/book-project/>). You will be able to access all Anna's notes, etc. at that link. The next meeting is on **February 10 at 7pm**.

Haven't signed up yet? It's never too late:

Register with <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/pax-christi-scotland-tickets-1041817703797?aff=oddtcreator>

Step 2: Eventbrite will send you the link to the Zoom meeting. Sign up for all events or singly. All the information is also on our website (<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>)