Ukraine: the nonviolent tools of war

In Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis writes ‘We can no longer think of war as a solution because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits.’ He told Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill ‘War is never the way,’ and he has continually advocated a nonviolent path.

But how does nonviolence work, especially in a conflict such as we see in Ukraine?

Marie Dennis, Programme Chair of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, and Senior Advisor to the Secretary General of Pax Christi International, says nonviolent action and a nonviolent vocabulary are part of the toolbox that can be used.

Given the ongoing carnage in Ukraine and the potentially catastrophic consequences, Pope Francis’ repeated assertion that "there is no such thing as a just war" rings true. The question is not whether to defend against a brutal military invasion, but how.

Emerging from the heartbreak of death, destruction and massive displacement caused by Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine is an inspiring demonstration of diverse nonviolent strategies that are upending the logic of war.

Negotiations/diplomacy, civil resistance, elements of civilian-based defence, symbolic action, non-cooperation, winning over enemy combatants, solidarity, accompaniment, music, art, acts of kindness and welcome, the use of digital tools to document war crimes and other nonviolent strategies have been in use since the beginning of the war.

At the same time, experienced nonviolence practitioners in Ukraine and beyond have been working to identify steps key to building a nonviolent future.

They urge support for nonviolent civil resistance in temporarily occupied territories and for youth nonviolent activists and peacebuilders, including through an online peace channel and website. They also urge significant attention to trauma care, including the development of customised materials tailored for the needs and contexts in Ukraine now; a school-based model of trauma informed care for youth impacted by the war; training of teachers/educators and youth/youth organisations on trauma first aid, and direct advocacy with Ukrainian and international authorities to understand the importance of supporting work with youth and response to trauma in Ukraine.

Pax Christi International’s Catholic Nonviolence Initiative also suggests increased support for unarmed civilian protection; avoiding dehumanising language that describes the adversary as “evil, diabolical, irrational, thugs or monsters” and diplomatic steps consistent with a just peace approach, including reduced militarisation, a denuclearised security relationship between Russia and the West and a common security and economic zone that brings Russia together with Ukraine as partners in a larger zone of peace. A series of strategic delegations, peace caravans and humanitarian airlifts into Ukraine could also interrupt hostilities.

Every step toward a just resolution of the crisis in Ukraine is helping us to see that nonviolence is not naïve, simplistic, disengaged or ineffective, but an essential approach toward the just peace for which we all yearn. 

Marie Dennis
The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons came into force in January 2021 and the First Meeting of State Parties took place from 21 to 23 June 2022 in Vienna, Austria. Scotland was represented at the event (Bill Kidd MSP wrote for Pax Scotia ahead of the meeting). The UK is not a signatory to the Treaty and so did not officially attend, although some Westminster MPS did. Here is an overview of the First Meeting of State Parties.

Jonathan Frerichs, the UN representative for disarmament in Geneva for Pax Christi International, attended the First Meeting of State Parties. Here he offers insight to the First Meeting and to the current geopolitical situation.

**Threats - and hopes**

Two futures for the world were on graphic display at the first meeting of the new treaty to ban nuclear weapons. Seventy-five governments and 100 civil society organisations from every continent met in Vienna in June to lay foundation stones for a nuclear-weapon-free world. That is one future. The other future was evident a few hundred kilometres east of Vienna in Ukraine. There, nuclear weapons are in effect being used to bluff, bedevil and potentially blackmail the opponents of Russia’s invasion.

That nuclear-armed future was laid bare when Russia’s highest officials brandished its nuclear weapons early in the Ukraine conflict. The Russian threats evoked for the whole world the inescapable insecurity that is inherent to nuclear weapons. Threatening a so-called “tactical” nuclear strike on Ukraine discredits the doctrines that all nuclear powers hide behind—and it did so in real time.

The biggest war in Europe since 1945 brought scenarios for such a strike into sharp focus. Those dreadful scenarios range from “no response” at one extreme to “Mutually Assured Destruction” at the other. The crisis in Ukraine made it clear that – after any use of nuclear weapons – escalation is essentially uncontrollable.

In stark contrast, a future free of nuclear weapons was on the table for broad engagement in Vienna. In fact, the Austrian capital hosted four global meetings dedicated to down-to-earth steps towards nuclear abolition. Some 600 civil society advocates attended a two-day mobilisation convocation organised by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and ICAN Austria. The level of expertise and participation showed that ICAN is alive and well, despite two-plus years of pandemic.

Next, on 20 June, the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons refreshed and updated the rationale driving the quest for a nuclear ban treaty for more than a decade. Parliamentarians from 15 legislatures also had a separate strategy meeting, including Scotland, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Belgium, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Italy, Iceland and Japan.

Then, on 21-23 June, came the First Meeting of States Parties of the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was delayed because of COVID. It was striking to see the number of states parties who have suffered from nuclear tests in the Pacific, in Central Asia and in Africa. Their interventions set the mood for debate and action, especially on treaty articles that mandate help for test victims and clean-up work at test sites.

Also noteworthy was that governments that rely on nuclear weapons took part in the meeting as observers. These included Norway, Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. Pax Christi met with delegates from ten countries to affirm observers in their role and to encourage more signatures and ratifications of the TPNW from other states. Some were from states in the Great Lakes region of Africa where PCI conducted a workshop on the treaty in the lead-up to Vienna.

**Hopes**

The TPNW member countries adopted the Vienna declaration, a strong multilateral document and a blueprint for progress towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. In regard to the world of nuclear threats and the war in Ukraine, treaty members condemned “any and all nuclear threats...irrespective of circumstances”. They also adopted an Action Plan to bring in more countries and put the new treaty to work building a world without nuclear weapons.

Jonathan Frerichs


**Reminder!**

Action for peace in Korea

* Go to the website at: https://en.endthekoreanwar.net/
* Please sign the appeal.
Pax Christi Scotland, in line with Pax Christi International thinking, names the situation in the Holy Land as ‘apartheid’. The dictionary definition of the word is ‘a system of keeping groups of people separate and treating them differently, especially when this results in disadvantage for one group’. In South Africa, such a policy imposed segregation and political, social, and economic discrimination against the nonwhite majority. We believe the Israeli government is imposing a similar policy against Palestinians. Here, Mike Mineter, a member of the Caritas, Justice and Peace Commission of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh, writing in a personal capacity, discusses that situation.

President Biden was greeted in the West Bank on 13 July by banners: ‘Mr President, This is Apartheid’. His rejection of that description prompted me to review my understanding of ‘apartheid’ concerning Israel.

The term ‘apartheid’ has been widely used by advocates of Palestinian rights for years: being defined in international law, facts can be assessed with objectivity, hopefully leading to accountability. The assertion of Israel’s apartheid has become increasingly widespread – why might this be? Israel’s Nation State Law gave the term impetus, as does seeing realities in webinars – for example, a video from Mondoweiss. South Africans, all too familiar with apartheid, have applied the term to Israel’s actions. Most recent is Brian Brown, author of the widely acclaimed Apartheid South Africa! Apartheid Israel? Reports from international and Israeli NGOs made it clear that apartheid crimes are committed not only in the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) but also within Israel. Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos published a dossier, detailing the above. Response is growing: the Presbyterian Church USA overwhelmingly passed a recent resolution naming apartheid. In Israel-Palestine the crimes of apartheid are legion but it is important to name their purpose. It is not merely to exploit, or to achieve racial segregation, but also to dispossess Palestinians of land, history, culture, identity and any opportunity for self-determination. It is to replace Palestinians by settlers – in other words settler colonialism.

It is also important to confront the false theologies that are claimed to normalise Israel’s objectives. At Tel Aviv airport Biden said, ‘I say again, you need not be a Jew to be a Zionist’ - a cheerleader for some 25 million Christian Zionists in America. A web search about Trump, Pence and CUFI (Christians United for Israel) will convince the unaware of the dominance of Christian Zionism in American politics. I commend Don Wagner’s new book, Glory to God in the Lowest. He writes beautifully of life in the USA, and moving from Christian Zionism to theology that is liberating for all, and to solidarity with those in poverty and with Palestinians. Other helpful resources include christianzionism.org, palestineportal.org, stephensizer.com and Avigail Abarbanel’s journey from Jewish Zionism.

Want to know more?

Apartheid South Africa! Apartheid Israel?, Brian J. Brown (ASIN: B09SP8JQL2)
Publisher: Independently published (February 20, 2022)

Glory To God In The Lowest, Donald E. Wagner (ISBN-10: 1623718260)
Publisher: Interlink Books

Exiting Zionism’ — a former Israeli’s awakening, Avigail Abarbanel
https://mondoweiss.net/2022/05/exitting-zionism-a-former-Israelis-awakening/

Christian Zionism - https://www.christianzionism.org/

Palestine Portal - Your resource for a just peace: https://www.palestineportal.org/

A Dossier on Israeli Apartheid: https://www.stephensizer.com/

What can WE do?

In a situation that is increasingly and intensely urgent how can we respond? Mike suggests:

• Learn (including from the annual Bishops’ communiques), visit, raise awareness
• Encourage people to join the UK-based Sabeel-Kairos in its advocacy for justice in Israel-Palestine and connections to Palestinian liberation theologians (sabeel-kairos.org.uk)
• Seek morally responsible investment (personal pension, other funds; church fund managers): avoid profiting from companies complicit in breaking international law or denying human rights, anywhere, including Israel and the OPT.
• Avoid buying produce from settlements.

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Our website

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https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCcmlpQvZ7Py_ul14szp95g
Click on the word ‘Subscribed’ and you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.

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The narrow white lens - time for change

In the last edition of Pax Scotia, teacher Nikki Munro wrote about the Building Racial Literacy course that she had attended, explaining that the course was intended to educate educators about the social construct of race, in order to support teachers to lead anti-racist practices in Scottish schools. She suggested that because of the way the Scottish curriculum is structured, our young people only see the world through a narrow ‘white’ lens that can foster an unconscious racism.

This inspired Pax Christi Scotland to plan an online event to explore the issue. Have we become complacent? Can we say that as a peace organisation we are challenging discrimination in all its forms if we don't actually explore how discrimination originates? Can the synodal Church truly reach out to the marginalised if she doesn’t acknowledge the reality of racism?

Of course we asked Nikki Munro (depute head teacher in a Dundee primary school) to share her experiences on the Building Racial Literacy course.

We will also hear from Glasgow councillor Graham Campbell, who will share his insight as Chair of Education, Skills & Early Years on the City Policy Committee. Graham is a veteran campaigner and activist, and Glasgow Council’s first Afro-Caribbean councillor.

Our third speaker is Margaret Ann Fisken. Originally from Trinidad, Margaret Ann is a barrister, and a former Chair of Catholic Association for Racial Justice.

So - a date for your diaries:
Sep 21, 2022 19:00 London time
Register in advance for this meeting at
https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEpdeCoqTwuH9eorLTh0c51KRB9PmMacAbI
You'll then receive an email with the link to the event

Graham Campbell
Margaret Ann Fisken
Nikki Munro