



Pax Scotia

Issue 72

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Peace of Mind Begins at Home: Local Action to End Gender Violence



Councillor Maureen Chalmers is COSLA's Community Wellbeing Spokesperson. She has worked in the third sector for 37 years mostly in advice, community development and health and social care organisations at local and national level. She has extensive experience in community, service and volunteer development and has been the Chief Officer of Hamilton Citizens Advice Bureau for the past 14 years. Maureen was elected to South Lanarkshire Council in 2017 and was Depute Leader of the SNP minority administration 2017-22 with several responsibilities including CoSLA delegate, re-elected in May 2022 and is currently Depute Leader of the SNP Group.

Peace is not only the absence of conflict. It is the presence of safety, dignity and justice in our homes, relationships and communities. Violence against women and girls stands against that vision. It harms individuals and families, weakens communities and denies too many people the peace of mind they deserve.

As COSLA's Community Wellbeing spokesperson, I know the vital role councils play in preventing and responding to this harm. COSLA's White Paper, Strengthening Local Delivery to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women and Girls, sets out what local government needs if Scotland is to make lasting progress: sustainable investment, stronger prevention, public service reform and the flexibility to respond to local circumstances. COSLA and the Scottish Government jointly own Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls. That shared ownership matters. It reflects a common commitment to a Scotland where women and children live free from abuse, coercion and fear. We may not always agree with government on the level or approach to investment required, but there is no disagreement on the importance of the ambition.

Councils are working in difficult circumstances. Demand is rising, services are stretched and public finances remain under real pressure. Even so, local government will continue to work with partners to protect women and children, support victims and survivors, and build safer communities. Ambition must, however, be matched by the resources and practical support needed to deliver it.

The nature of violence is also changing. Domestic abuse, sexual violence and coercive control remain urgent concerns, while digital technology is creating new routes for harm through

online harassment, stalking, image-based abuse, misogynistic content and coordinated hate. Young people are being exposed to messages that normalise inequality and hostility towards women and girls. Prevention must keep pace with that reality.

This is where communities, including Pax Christi Scotland, have an important contribution to make. The values of peacebuilding and nonviolence sit closely alongside the principles of Equally Safe. Ending violence requires effective services and policy, but it also requires people willing to challenge the attitudes and behaviours that allow harm to take root.

That contribution can be practical and local. Members can challenge everyday sexism in conversations, workplaces, social settings and online spaces. They can refuse to treat misogynistic jokes as harmless, encourage respectful relationships, and help young people recognise unhealthy behaviour and coercive control.

They can also help counter online misogyny by encouraging critical thinking about social media, questioning narratives that promote hostility towards women, and supporting young people to navigate digital spaces safely. Parents, grandparents, teachers, faith communities and local leaders all have a part to play.

Support for local specialist organisations is another powerful form of action. Volunteering, fundraising, raising awareness, engaging with councillors and Violence Against Women Partnerships, and advocating for sustained investment can all strengthen the services that protect and support victims and survivors.

Preventing violence against women and girls is not the responsibility of government alone. It is a shared societal endeavour. Every action that promotes equality, dignity and respect weakens the foundations on which violence is built.

COSLA's White Paper is clear that local delivery matters. So does local leadership. By challenging harmful attitudes, supporting survivors, strengthening communities and pressing for lasting change, we can help create a Scotland where women, children and families live not with fear and uncertainty, but with safety, dignity and genuine peace of mind.

Maureen Chalmers



Prud Zihahirwa is a young entrepreneur from eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. He writes blogs for the Pax Christi Scotland website and articles for our newsletter, alongside his career with AFRIX Global, with whom he works in education and technology. He contributes his skills to Pax Christi International. Here he reflects on how the northern hemisphere's emphasis on military spending is adversely affecting Africa.



Peace: more weapons - or protecting life?

A few days ago, in a health facility in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a health worker told me something I will never forget:

"We are not only lacking medicines. Sometimes, we lack the resources needed to prevent a simple illness from becoming a tragedy."

This is a reality most people in the world's major capitals do not see. Here, in many communities in eastern DRC, decisions made thousands of kilometres away have very real consequences.

When international funding is reduced, it does not immediately appear as a crisis in government offices or budget documents. But on the ground, it can mean a vaccine that does not arrive, a health centre reducing its services, a family leaving without treatment, or a child waiting too long before receiving care.

For many Congolese people living in conflict-affected areas, this is not only an economic issue. It is a matter of survival.

Behind budget decisions, there are human lives. Today, several major powers are redirecting part of their budgets towards defence spending in response to growing international tensions.

In the United Kingdom, the government has announced a progressive reduction in overseas aid spending, with the objective of allocating more resources to national defence. This decision risks reducing the funds available for important international development and health programmes. In the United States, major changes affecting American foreign assistance, including restrictions and disruptions affecting programmes previously supported by USAID, have raised serious concerns among humanitarian and global health organisations. Essential programmes supporting disease prevention, emergency response, nutrition and healthcare systems have been placed under significant pressure.

For those making these decisions, these are often billions of dollars in budget calculations. But for communities like ours, these figures become human realities.

A reduced budget can become a mother unable to find the medicine her child needs.

A cancelled programme can become a health centre without enough supplies.

A political decision made in a distant capital can affect a village thousands of kilometres away.

The DRC, is currently facing one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. In the eastern part of the country, communities are experiencing the combined impact of armed conflicts, forced displacement, poverty and recurring health emergencies.

In Goma, where thousands of families have been displaced by violence, humanitarian needs remain enormous. In Beni, where communities have already suffered years of insecurity and health crises, local health structures continue to operate with limited resources.

The numbers tell only part of the story:

- Millions of Congolese require urgent humanitarian assistance.
- The humanitarian response plan for the DRC requires billions of dollars to address needs related to healthcare, food assistance, protection, water and support for displaced populations.
- Outbreaks of cholera, measles, Mpox and other diseases continue to reveal the vulnerability of the healthcare system.

But behind these figures, there are real stories - the displaced family living in difficult conditions with limited access to clean water; the pregnant woman who must travel long distances to reach medical care; the child facing complications because a vaccine or essential medicine was not available at the right moment. When vaccines disappear, diseases advance.

In a region where communities are already weakened by conflict and displacement, prevention is essential.

Vaccines are not simply medical products. They are protection against future crises.

Essential medicines are not just boxes on pharmacy shelves. They often represent the difference between a quick recovery and a life-threatening situation.

Community health workers are not just employees. They are sometimes the last connection between isolated families and the healthcare system.

When funding decreases, this entire chain becomes weaker.

Peace cannot be built with weapons.

From eastern DRC, we know the price of conflict. We understand that security matters; that governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens.

But lasting peace cannot be built through weapons and military equipment. Peace is built through open schools, functioning hospitals, vaccinated children, trained young people and communities capable of facing future crises.

True security begins with protecting human life.

Prud Zihahirwa



Where next as the nuclear powers spend ever more on weapons of mass destruction?

Delia Chatoor, our correspondent in Trinidad and Tobago and UN observer, has been reflecting on the 11th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as states which cling to their possession of nuclear weapons prevent any agreement on moving towards a non-nuclear future. The survival of humanity, she reminds us, is at stake ,...

The Non Proliferation Treaty which entered into force in 1970 is generally acknowledged as the lynchpin of the international nuclear order. It was, therefore, a great disappointment to the non-nuclear weapon states that at the conclusion of the 11th Review Conference of the Parties to that Treaty in May this year, it was impossible yet again for delegates to produce a consensual final document.

There were similar results in 2015 and 2022 - the last successfully negotiated final document being in 2010.

This outcome serves to demonstrate the growing division between the nuclear weapon states and the non-nuclear weapon states, and here we are reminded that these two categories are included in the NPT, each commanding specific rights, obligations, and responsibilities.

We should note that the NPT Review Conference was held at a time of ongoing regional conflicts in which nuclear facilities had been under attack, and when all parties involved were not willing to arrive at meaningful solutions.

What was equally unfortunate and, which distressed the 74 States Parties and 95 signatories to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, was the weakening of reference to the humanitarian consequences which could be caused through the accidental or deliberate use of nuclear weapons. It was reported that there was persistent pressure by nuclear weapon states to emphasise instead, inter alia, "state-level risk reduction", and "crisis management".

For over a decade, the non-nuclear weapons states, as well as civil society organisations, have championed the particular approach through the provision of irrefutable evidence on the indiscriminate, catastrophic and irreversible impacts of nuclear detonation.

Even though we can concede that the examination of risk reduction is pertinent and so must be pursued by all NPT States parties, there is room for a parallel track which must continue stressing the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of use of a nuclear weapon/device.

Other concepts which were considered at the NPT conference, and by many interested states outside of that arena - and which must be examined - are the concerted condemnation of threats to use nuclear weapons, and any statement which would detract from the use of such weapons. And there must be compliance with the established and

acceptable principles of International Humanitarian Law under all circumstances. This is the case, even while a number of States have emphatically declared that the use of nuclear weapons is not a violation of International Humanitarian Law

In this regard, reference is made to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 1996 which was based on the question before the Court: *"Is the threat or use of nuclear weapons in any circumstance permitted under international law?"*

The Court was unable to provide a definitive response but noted that it was not possible *"to conclude whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake"*.

In addition to the unease following the inconclusive Review Conference, most States continue to express concerns on the increase in the combined spending on nuclear arsenals by the Nuclear Weapon States. In 2025, it is reported that this increase amounted to 19% from 2024, when it stood at USD 16.8 billion.

How can this be fair and equitable when, over the past few years, the international development and humanitarian sectors, including the United Nations, have witnessed a drop in funding from countries that persist in rearming both their conventional and nuclear arsenals? The proliferation of both presents an unreal and questionable use of resources to tackle security.

This led Pope Leo XIV to state when signing his first encyclical 'Magnifica Humanitas' that "Humanity possesses far more effective and capable tools for promoting human life and resolving conflicts, such as dialogue, diplomacy and forgiveness. The use of force, violence and weapons reflects a relational poverty that always has disastrous consequences for civilian populations."

Our reality, however, is that the existence of nuclear weapons, the billions being expended on their modernisation, and the threat of their use are irrefutable elements pointing to the need to address what could be preventable. There was to be the recognition and application of the "Rules-based Order", and the implementation of Article VI of the NPT which advocates for all negotiations to "be conducted in good faith. "The very survival of humankind could be at stake. This can only be achieved through the total elimination of nuclear weapons."

Delia Chatoor

Our website

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

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Please pay in November by online banking, and give your name to identify your payment. Use the email address on the website to get banking details.

If you wish to pay by cheque, send to the snail mail 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.

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Peace: a responsibility & a duty



Mgr Gerry Fitzpatrick is a parish priest and has been the Director of Music of the Archdiocese of Glasgow. (He studied in Rome and at Glasgow University.) He collaborated with many others in working for the renewal of music and liturgy in Scotland, with The St Mungo Singers, with radioalba.org and Glasgow Churches Together. He reflects here on peace - and the peace music can bring.

‘Lord Jesus Christ,
who said to your Apostles:
Peace I leave you, my peace I give you
Look not on our sins,
but on the faith of your Church,
and graciously grant her peace and unity
in accordance with your will.
Who live and reign for ever and ever.’

Priest: Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days

Priest: Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles, Peace I leave you, my peace I give you, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will. Who live and reign for ever and ever.

These prayers come after the Lord's Prayer at Mass and are followed by the invitation 'The Peace of the Lord be with you always' and a handshake which is described as 'the Sign of Peace,' by the short Litany ('the Lamb of God') which ends with 'grant us peace', and finally as we prepare to leave by the urge to 'Go in peace.'

Sometimes we cannot see the woods for the trees and perhaps that is quite natural, given the complexity of life and liturgy – the business of family life, the opening of Mass, the readings and intercessions, the Eucharistic Prayer and Communion - but the impetus driving us forward throughout leads us to Communion with God and with each other, and the gift of peace. It is not obsessional, but it is affirming that peace matters, that concern for peace is always a responsibility and a duty.

I mention these things because many of us have a deep concern for peace for ourselves, our families, and for good relations among the churches and the nations, and in our anxiety we can forget that the liturgy has been devised taking account of the experience of the church throughout the ages and prayer for peace is built into the Church's life.

Some of our prayers are accompanied by gestures such as standing or kneeling, and others are re-inforced by music or song. For example, we sit to listen; we stand and shake hands for the Sign of Peace; and there are various postures for receiving Communion.

Music can inspire inner peace: I remember a very moving visit to Nicaea, two and a half hours south of Istanbul, where the Nicene Creed was agreed in the year 325 A.D. When visiting the ancient Basilica (now a Mosque) my friend and I went outside to the rear of the church and very quietly sang the Nicene Creed. I am sure no-one would have bothered us – but better safe than sorry! We probably were the only Christians in Nicaea and were so grateful to be there. The Creed felt very special because we were 'there' and we sang it. As far as I remember we sang it quietly in Latin then in the dialogue form we use at Easter.

Another occasion was a visit to the Abbey of Fontfroide (founded 1093 A.D.) near Carcassonne. Another friend and I were so impressed with the Abbey and its style and acoustics that we quietly sang the Salve Regina and were quietly amused when lots of visitors gathered round us and seemed to think we were wonderful singers! We hoped we may have inspired inner peace...

Gerry Fitzpatrick