



Pax Scotia

Issue 68

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Challenging together the silence around “the bomb”

Michel Roy has been secretary general of the French Bishops Conference Justice and Peace Commission since 2021. Prior to that, he was the secretary general of Caritas Internationalis from 2011-2019). Caritas is a confederation of 163 national organisations of which SCIAF is the Scottish member.

For many years, faith-based organisations, particularly Christian ones, have been discussing and acting on the frightening reality of nuclear weapons used as deterrence to avoid the worst, when they **are** the worst. And no security control procedures will ever grant the security everyone is longing for, that only definitive disarmament can provide.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) provides for that, in article VI, insisting on “pursuing, in good faith, negotiations on effective measures for the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and for nuclear disarmament”. This treaty, ratified in 1968, has become the symbol of the inability of world leaders to act to that end. It can be considered dead. But they still stick to it, as if it were an armour... Moreover, the New Start treaty coming to an end at the beginning of this year has not been renewed, opening gates for more nuclear weapons. All contrary to what is needed for the sake of humanity and the planet.

The only treaty which offers peace in the long term is the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which the Holy See was involved in writing and signed and ratified on the very day of its publication. But that treaty is rejected and ignored by the governments of those countries which retain nuclear armament. Among which are the UK and France.

Hence our involvement as Christian organisations together with other civil society organisations from our two countries to promote an end to nuclear armament, challenging nuclear deterrence, asking for a real process to disarm under international supervision so that all 9

countries possessing nuclear weapons stop having them. We are encouraged by the social teachings of the Church, particularly of Pope Francis and now Pope Leo, that possession of nuclear armaments is immoral. There are lots of other arguments to be developed so that everyone in our societies move from resignation or incomprehension to mobilisation to ask our governments to take real action, beyond words and esoteric belief (that hides many interests of the industrial defence business) that deterrence can still work, if it has ever worked.

Because yes, all this is also about money, and does not take into consideration either poverty alleviation or climatic change that need finance that is not available anymore, with huge reductions in those budgets. Rearmament, beyond nuclear rearmament, is right now subtracting huge amounts of money from human development endeavours and the protection of the future of humanity.

We came together in London last November to discuss ‘an alternative vision of security for France and the UK’ and will renew this engagement with a conference in Paris in October this year. We want Church leaders to move forward on this. They may be prevented by the political environment to do so, but it is essential, fundamental, that they take the lead on this crucial issue. We need to create an enabling environment to promote the fact that to start with, our governments agree to send observers to the meetings of the state parties to the TPNW. An important one will take place end of November in New York.

Let me end with extracts of the prayer that Pope Leo invites us to pray this March:

Today, we lift up our prayers for peace in the world, imploring nations to renounce weapons and choose the path of dialogue and diplomacy... Help us to understand, O Lord, that true security does not arise from control fuelled by fear, but from trust, justice and solidarity among peoples... May the nuclear threat never again determine the future of humanity.

Michel Roy



Prudent (Prud) Zihahirwa is Pax Christi Scotland's voice in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He's a digital creator and Youth Ambassador for the Panzi Foundation, promoting social justice in vulnerable communities, and founder and trainer at Afrix Global, an EdTech start-up based in Goma.



Prud
Zihahirwa

The geography changes... the suffering remains the same

As these lines are written, no one can say how the situation in the Middle East will evolve – only that human suffering is inevitable. A simple but too often forgotten truth is that the consequences of war are the same everywhere. Whether it erupts in Iran, Lebanon, or the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, war produces the same reality for civilians: fear, mass displacement, economic isolation, the destruction of infrastructure, and the gradual collapse of everyday life.

The Middle East conflict's consequences are global. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil supply passes, has sent shockwaves through international markets. Oil prices have reached historic levels. Maritime transport in the Gulf is nearly paralysed. Insurance companies have suspended coverage for ships in the area, while financial markets plunge into uncertainty and gold prices reach record highs.

Yet while global media attention focuses on the Middle East, another war continues to unfold almost in silence in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. In North Kivu, fighting continues between the Armed Forces of the DRC and the AFC/M23 movement. Despite diplomatic efforts, the security situation remains extremely worrying.

On 24 February 2026, Willy Ngoma, the military spokesperson of the movement, was killed in a drone strike targeting a military convoy near Rubaya. Several officers were reportedly injured in the attack. His death, confirmed a few days later, marked a turning point in the military escalation.

As in the Middle East, warfare is evolving. Drones are becoming a central instrument of military operations. On 1 March, Congolese authorities announced that they had foiled a drone attack targeting Kisangani airport. At least two

drones were reportedly neutralised using an Indian-made anti-drone system known as D4. During a previous attack claimed by AFC/M23, eight drones were said to have been intercepted.

These developments illustrate a troubling trend: the rapid diffusion of sophisticated military technologies into local conflicts. Drones, detection systems, neutralisation technologies, and surveillance tools now circulate on a global scale. Today's conflicts are no longer isolated. They are interconnected through a global economy of armaments.

For many countries, weapons production represents a significant portion of their gross domestic product. Entire industries depend on the manufacturing, export, and modernisation of military technologies. The drones flying over the Middle East today, the anti-drone systems deployed in Central Africa, the missiles and surveillance software are all products of an extremely lucrative global market.

This obscene trade fuels conflicts far more than it resolves them. It sustains wars that may be geographically distant but are connected through the same industrial supply chains. Weapons circulate, profits grow, and civilians pay the heaviest price.

In Goma, violence is not confined to the front lines. It also affects civil society and the world of information. Magloire Paluku Kavunga, a well-known figure in the region, was shot dead in the streets of the city. This journalist, poet, musician, actor, and radio host founded Radio Kivu 1, an influential station in Goma, and had also served as a cultural adviser at the Congolese Ministry of Culture. Was he killed because he influenced people? In many conflicts, TV and radio stations are among the first institutions to be silenced. Controlling information means controlling the narrative of war and that now also means Internet shutdowns are increasingly used as weapons. By cutting communications, authorities isolate populations, prevent the circulation of testimonies, and reduce the visibility of violence.

In eastern DRC, the consequences of war are also economic and social. In Goma, banks remain closed, paralysing transactions. We can't access savings. The airport remains closed, further isolating the city and complicating the delivery of humanitarian aid. 'Warfare' includes the closure of borders, the paralysis of financial institutions, the disruption of transport systems, and the isolation of entire cities. Whether in Beirut, Tehran, or Goma, the results are the same: displaced populations, fragile infrastructure, paralysed economies, and societies plunged into uncertainty.

The geography changes, but the suffering remains the same.

Some diplomatic efforts continue, but the dominant dynamic remains one of militarisation. In the face of this reality, it is urgent to recall that security cannot be built solely through military power. Weapons may impose silence, but they do not create peace. In the Middle East as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, civilians continue to bear the heaviest burden.

If lasting peace is ever to emerge, it will have to rest on something other than the logic of arms: dialogue, justice, political responsibility, and the genuine protection of civilians. The peoples of Iran, Lebanon, Israel, and eastern Congo live in different contexts, yet their suffering profoundly resembles one another. Recognising this shared humanity may be the first step toward a true and lasting peace.

Prud Zihahirwa



Dr Alessandra Cecolin is a Lecturer in Middle Eastern History at the University of Aberdeen, specialising in the migration and lived experiences of ethnic and religious minorities across the Middle East, with expertise in the history of Iranian Jews. Her research examines the trajectories of oppressed and underrepresented communities in both Middle Eastern and European contexts, focusing on their strategies of resilience and resistance, as well as the social, political, and cultural dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in host societies. Through this work, she aims to foreground marginalised voices and contribute to broader debates on migration, minority identity, and belonging.

Fleeing conflict - dubbed ‘invaders’

Asylum policy has dominated national headlines in recent years, particularly around small boat crossings and border enforcement. In Aberdeen, however, the issue is no longer confined to the Westminster debate. Across the city and Aberdeenshire, men and women seeking asylum are living in hotel accommodation. At the same time, they wait, often for many months, for decisions that will determine whether they can remain in the UK or face removal.

Their circumstances reflect a border regime that has tightened steadily over the past decade. The 2012 “hostile environment” policy aimed to make everyday life more restrictive for those without secure immigration status. Subsequent legislation, including the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and the Illegal Migration Act 2023, expanded enforcement powers and sought to deter irregular arrivals. Ministers argue that such measures are necessary to prevent dangerous journeys and maintain public confidence in the system. Critics say they have coincided with longer delays and a growing backlog of unresolved cases.

The consequences are visible in the expanded use of hotels as contingency accommodation. Since 2019, hotels in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire have housed asylum seekers while their applications move through an often-slow administrative process. What was described as temporary has, for many, become prolonged. Residents are not permitted to work and must rely on a limited weekly allowance, just over £8 per week for personal expenses, where meals are provided. They have little control over daily routines and no clear indication of when their case will be resolved.

The system extends well beyond the point of arrival. Applicants undergo registration, interviews and biometric checks, and may face reporting requirements while their claims are assessed. In practice, the border continues through paperwork and policy, regulating employment, housing and movement long after entry into the country. Public reaction has been mixed. In December 2025, a protest in Aberdeen featured a speech warning that “once great nations” were becoming “unrecognisable under the weight of the suicidal open borders policy,” with migrants and asylum seekers described as “invaders.” Reporting on similar demonstrations elsewhere in Scotland has documented what observers termed “anti-Islam rhetoric and crude racism,” including inflammatory slogans and symbols.

Local councillors acknowledge that the use of hotels for asylum accommodation has raised concerns about housing capacity and service pressures. At the same time, legal specialists note that seeking asylum is lawful under both international and domestic law. Individuals placed in hotel accommodation do not choose their location

and cannot relocate independently. For residents, extended waiting periods can intensify anxiety. Many have fled conflict, political persecution or violence. Some speak of the psychological strain of prolonged uncertainty and enforced inactivity. Yet the local picture is not defined solely by restriction.

Within hotel settings, residents have organised informal English-language classes, pooling skills and teaching one another. Some volunteers give their time to help newcomers navigate the asylum process, translating letters and explaining procedures. Others have taken part in peaceful protests and hunger strikes across Scotland to draw attention to living conditions and processing delays. These actions reflect attempts to assert visibility and voice within a tightly regulated system.

Beyond organised protest, agency is also evident in everyday life. Residents maintain contact with families abroad, support one another through shared meals and prayer, and form informal networks that help mitigate isolation. Several have expressed a clear intention to contribute to local society if granted the right to remain, citing professional backgrounds and aspirations to work, study or volunteer. Community responses have also emerged. Faith groups, charities and volunteers in the North-East have provided language assistance, social contact and pastoral care. Organisations have collaborated to support individuals housed in local hotels, offering practical help with clothing and essential items. Catholic parishes, drawing on social teaching articulated by Pope Leo XIII and subsequent Church leaders, have emphasised solidarity with those in vulnerable circumstances.

Housing shortages and stretched services remain ongoing concerns across Scotland. At the same time, individuals in asylum accommodation have no right to work and no control over their placement. In Aberdeen, the national border regime is no longer an abstract policy framework. It is a lived administrative reality, one that shapes daily life for asylum seekers while they wait, organise, and seek to build a future within the limits imposed upon them.

Alessandra Cecolin

Our website

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'We are oppressed but not crushed'

Pax Christi Scotland chair Marian Pallister reflects on the situation in Palestine.

As we approach Holy Week and Easter, our thoughts, of course, focus on the Holy Land. The places we see in our mind's eye that our Lord would have known, or which have become faith landmarks in the centuries since His last days on this earth.

Some of you will have been lucky enough to visit those sites. For others, it's high on the bucket list. Or perhaps we are content to see in our mind's eye the pictures painted by the scriptures which so movingly unfold in the days ahead.

There are also Muslim sites in this holiest of geographical sites, and Ramadan would have focused Scottish Muslims' minds on Jerusalem.

Pax Christi International's friend Usama Nicola is not only one of the contacts who keep us up to speed with the situation in Palestine when we have our monthly online 'Holy Land Group' meetings but by profession is - has been - a tour guide. I say 'has been' because pilgrims and tourists are unable to visit now. Borders are closed, bombs are dropping, shrapnel is destroying property and injuring or killing people as Israel carries out the war it began with the United States of America against Iran, and Iran retaliates.

If things were tough for Palestinians before that war began at the end of February, they have become much more so as daily - and nightly - attacks take place above their heads.

There are no bomb shelters in Palestine.

Children have been sent home from school and are to study online - as long as 'online' continues. The holy places are shut. Usama says all holy places have been closed since the war started because gathering is not allowed. Zoughbi Zoughbi at the West Bank organisation Wi'am told me last week 'We try to provide what is needed and enhance some hope for people through Easter and Ramadan.'

I have spoken with many people here in Scotland who feel helpless and hopeless because we believe we can't offer the help that is needed; can't persuade political leaders to negotiate instead of contributing to an insane war - but we can't succumb to such despair.

Zoughbi said 'Despite it all, we are walking the stations of the cross every day. We are not defeated. "We are oppressed but not crushed" is a powerful expression of resilience based on 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, which states that despite being hard-pressed, perplexed, or knocked down, we are not destroyed or driven to despair. This powerful image and philosophy emphasise overcoming intense hardship through inner strength and divine, rather than human power.'

If **they** can summon up through their faith such resilience, may **we** continue to work wholeheartedly for a nonviolent world.

Marian Pallister

