



Pax Scotia

Issue 75

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Breaking the Cycles of Violence: What Prevention Must Mean



Karen Adam is SNP MSP for Banffshire and Buchan Coast and Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People and Gaelic Committee. First elected in 2021, she previously served as Convener of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, and has spoken regularly on equality, human rights and violence against women and girls, drawing on both lived experience & her perspective as a mother of six.

When I spoke in the Scottish Parliament recently about male violence against women and girls, I did so as someone who has experienced male violence in my own life.

But when I reflected on what I wanted to say, my thoughts kept returning not only to my own experiences, but to my children, my daughter and my five sons, and to what I have learned watching them grow up in a world that has changed profoundly during my 35 years as a mother. My youngest son is now a teenager, growing up in a very different environment to the one my daughter entered in 1991. There was no TikTok, no algorithm deciding what a young person would see next, and no manosphere influencer able to speak directly to millions of boys.

It made me think about how we influence our children in a world where competing for that influence has become big business. If we are serious about preventing violence, we cannot simply give boys a list of things they must never do and hope that list survives whatever the world throws at them.

We have to go deeper.

We have to nurture a moral instinct, empathy, respect, equality and self-control becoming part of who a young person is, so that when other voices try to pull them in another direction, those voices cannot compete with the strength of their own values.

We can be unequivocal that male violence against women is a male problem without telling every boy that he is a problem.

That distinction matters.

We need to show boys what good, healthy masculinity looks like. **Strength** is not controlling somebody else; it is being able to control yourself. **Confidence** is not entitlement; it is being secure enough to respect another person's choices. **Courage** is not simply going along with your friends when they cross a line; sometimes courage is being the one who challenges them. And *being emotional or vulnerable is not weakness.*

The deepest form of prevention is not a young man thinking, "I shouldn't do that because I might get into trouble." It is something within him saying, "I couldn't do that, because it would violate who I am."

But boys are growing up surrounded by competing messages, and men have a responsibility here. Fathers, brothers, teachers, youth workers, people in sport, music, culture and public life, all men have a part to play.

Men need to make respect aspirational.

None of that diminishes accountability. A man who abuses, controls or assaults a woman is responsible for what he does. Anger does not excuse it, and no experience in a man's life gives him the right to make a woman frightened for hers.

But if we are serious about prevention, our ambition cannot begin once a woman has already been harmed. For too long, women have been expected to adapt ourselves around male violence. We think about how we get home, how we reject somebody, whether we should answer back, whether it is safe to leave and, sometimes, whether it is safe to stay.

Women cannot simply be handed another safety strategy and told to manage the risk better. Society has to do the work further upstream.

We have spent generations teaching girls how to navigate the danger. Surely now our ambition must be to change what creates that danger in the first place. Do not make boys afraid of what they might become. *Show them something worth becoming.*

Our daughters should not have to grow up learning how to survive male violence. Our sons can be part of the generation that ends it.

Karen Adam



Anne Dobbing was born in England 71 years ago to Irish immigrant parents. She was a qualified nurse, then retrained as a teacher, first for English as a Foreign Language, then as a primary school teacher. After 30 years working as a teacher in England and then in Shetland, she moved to Galloway in SW Scotland, where she combines volunteer teaching for refugees with active membership of Pax Christi Scotland and work as a panel member for Children's Hearings Scotland. Her tiny prayer garden & peace chapel are open to people of all faiths and none.



Multilateralism at the Crossroads: Some vital questions to ponder

This was my first Pax Christi International online event, and I was thrilled to be present (albeit remotely) in the European Parliament in Brussels. I have always been a proud European and even Brexit couldn't change the pride I feel in my European identity. I believe in multilateralism: in listening, dialogue, cooperation, and collaboration.

Organised by Pax Christi International and sponsored by Danilo Della Valle, an Italian politician of the 5 Star movement, who was elected to the EU Parliament in 2024, the event was entitled 'Multilateralism at the crossroads': a Left Outreach Event of Members of the European Parliament.

I was quite ready to listen and learn - and be impressed.

But I was not prepared for the breadth of the debate and the calibre of the eighteen speakers, skilfully moderated by Giulia Bourdin of Pax Christi International. They were alerted, politely but firmly, by Giulia when only one minute remained of their allocated speaking time; and within those time constraints, the contributors drew on their lifelong advocacy for peace and deep knowledge to inform and challenge us as listeners.

In just over the two hours, that reminded me a bit of 'speed dating', they led us through testimony from round the world, encompassing Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the USA, South America, and Asia. The Speakers' contributions were passionate, relevant, and deeply rooted in first hand lived experiences.

So what were the themes that emerged from the debate? I can't sum everything up in this limited space, but I can indicate some of the questions that we were left with.

Danilo della Valle reminded us that democracy is not working. Present world conflicts undermine democracy and there is emerging a new framework of Nationalism.

Giulia then posed our focus questions:

1. What needs to change?
2. Who should shape that change?
3. What can the EU do?

These questions were suggested by the subsequent speakers:

Should the UN be reformed, or defended from reform?

If so, could Article 109 point a potential way to reforming the UN?

Why hasn't there been a Special Session on Disarmament since 1989?

Who or what is Europe?

How can the EU act multilaterally to protect rights and solve problems without using force?

What role should the EU play in political solutions, peacemaking and mediation?

How can the EU talk about peace when it cuts Aid budgets and sends arms to conflict zones?

Could the EU be effective in ending the power of veto in order to stop criminal activity by anti-democratic political leaders?

Should the UK give up its seat as a UN Permanent Member to India?

How can we revitalise multilateralism?

Would it be more appropriate to celebrate an Interdependence Day, rather than Independence Day?

How can we include climate change in multilateral future plans?

How great a threat is the reemergence of Fascism to the success of Multilateralism?

How can we ensure that Multilateralism is able to fulfil its mandate in countries where the agencies working for the UN like UNWRA are themselves attacked?

How can we promote a message of 'We are your neighbour' among neighbouring countries, encouraging assistance freely asked for and given?

How do we put people first? How do we push for a sustainable world?

How can we make governments more accountable for the effects of their policies on people, for example using budgets to buy armaments instead of healthcare?

How can indigenous communities' rights to land, water and minerals, be defended in the face of the illegitimate power dynamic of mining companies?

How can resources be shared with indigenous peoples?

Would it be possible to create a fund for peace?

How do we reconnect people with governments?

How can platforms be created that are inclusive, proactive, inter-generational, pragmatic and in touch?

Can the African Union serve as a model of an indigenous alternative to conflict resolution?

What are the implications of AI? Does Pope Leo's analysis in his *Magnifica Humanitas* encyclical present a viable message about the need to safeguard Humans in an age of AI?

How can the dignity of the most vulnerable be safeguarded?

How can the xenophobia generated by the forced migration of people as a result of climate change be overcome?

In 2018 Pope Francis told a group of young people, "Be brave in these days. Say what you have to say. If you err, someone will correct you. I have faith that in these days God will speak ... through you." The courage and honesty of the speakers in this debate about multilateralism once again gives us hope in that these earnest, eminent people are seeking peace through a return to genuine multilateralism. May this conversation continue and grow.
Anne Dobbing



Breaking the Cycles of Violence

Enabling peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Florence Iragi trained as a nutritionist and is married with four children. A volunteer with the Democratic Republic of Congo's organisation AFRIKIN-RDC since 2019, she accompanies and mentors vulnerable women and young girls, particularly through vocational training and initiatives aimed at their economic empowerment, dignity and resilience.

Dateline Goma. In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, more than three decades of armed conflict have profoundly upended community life. Behind the statistics on displacement, poverty and violence are women and young girls who try every day to rebuild their lives, often after losing a loved one, their home, their livelihood, or simply hope for a better future.

At AFRIKIN-RDC (African Kids In Need), we are especially committed to vulnerable women, girls, young people and children. Our conviction is simple: giving a person the means to reclaim their dignity, their skills and their independence also help rebuild their family and their community.

I have volunteered with AFRIKIN-RDC since 2019. I accompany vulnerable women and young girls in particular through our training and empowerment activities. At AFRIKIN-RDC's tailoring and dressmaking centre, we create a space where women can learn a trade, rebuild their self-confidence, share with one another, and begin to imagine their future with greater hope.

We also support young mothers, who are especially exposed to poverty, stigma and exclusion. At our centre, they are trained in pastry-making and the production of local juices, in addition to tailoring and dressmaking. These skills can help them build small income-generating activities and gradually become more self-reliant.

Some of the young girls we support have lived through especially painful experiences. Some were victims of sexual violence and are now raising their children in very difficult conditions. In some cases, they do not even know the identity of their child's father. They alone must then bear the social, economic and psychological consequences of violence they did not choose.

Faced with these realities, our first responsibility is to welcome them without judgment, to listen to them, and to remind them that they are not defined by what they have suffered. We seek to restore their confidence, pass on skills to them, and create the conditions that allow them to gradually rebuild their lives and the lives of their children.

AFRIKIN-RDC's work does not stop at vocational training,

however. Our organisation is also active in the education and protection of vulnerable children, youth empowerment, agriculture and livestock farming, human rights, civic education, peace and reconciliation, and community resilience.

Through initiatives such as "Dancing to Heal," we also create spaces for expression, sharing and the rebuilding of social bonds for children, women and communities affected by crises.

Our resources remain modest compared with the sheer scale of the needs. Yet every woman who learns a trade, every young mother who regains confidence in herself, every child who receives support to continue their schooling, and every young person who discovers a new perspective, is for us a reason to carry on.

We do not want the women and young girls of eastern DRC to be seen only as victims. They are also agents of change, capable of rising, creating, building and contributing to the reconstruction of their communities.

After so many years of conflict, rebuilding peace also means rebuilding people. It begins with listening, dignity, training, independence and hope.

At AFRIKIN-RDC, we will keep moving forward with them, convinced that every skill gained can become a new chance, and that every new chance can help bring about a different future.

Florence Iragi



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:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

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Membership Reminder

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.

Explore the website for all our activities:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

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Visiting Russia: Hospitality, War & Peace



Prudent 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 reflects here on his visits to Russia...

Since 2025, I have had the opportunity to visit many parts of Russia. My journeys have taken me to Moscow, Orenburg, Yekaterinburg in the Sverdlovsk region of the Urals, Ivanovo, Yaroslavl and Kostroma. Each visit has offered me new experiences, friendships and opportunities to understand Russian society beyond the headlines.

One thing that has particularly struck me is the hospitality of the Russian people, who have been welcoming and willing to exchange ideas, share their culture and learn about life in other countries. Even when governments are in conflict, ordinary people can still build relationships across national and cultural boundaries.

However, Russia has been at war since it launched its invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. During my visits, I have been conscious of this reality, although it has not always been immediately visible in everyday life. My experience as a visitor cannot tell the whole story of a country at war, and I recognise that people experience the conflict in very different ways.

I have become more aware of the practical consequences of international sanctions. Financial transactions across borders can be extremely difficult, while international business exchanges face significant obstacles. These restrictions affect the connections that individuals and businesses can maintain with the rest of the world. I am still learning about the wider implications, but I have seen how international politics can influence ordinary economic and professional relationships.

Travelling as a young African to Russia, particularly at airports, many have asked if I was travelling to Russia to join the army. Sometimes young African travellers are viewed with suspicion and are stereotyped, despite travelling internationally for education, professional development, cultural exchange, discovering another country and contributing positively to our own countries, as I have done. Our ambitions should not automatically be viewed through the lens of war.

For me, this raises an important question: how can we build trust between people from different countries when assumptions about nationality, race or destination can shape the way we are perceived before we have even had the opportunity to speak for ourselves?

At the same time, Russia organises international gatherings that bring young people together, such as the World Youth Festival in 2024, which brought together more than 10,000 young participants from many countries. Such events create opportunities for cultural exchange, professional networking and the discovery of Russia's history, scientific achievements and cultural heritage. They also allow young people to encounter one another beyond the boundaries of national narratives.

What does peace mean to the Russians I have met? I have learned that listening, meeting and exchanging experiences matter. Peace must be more than the absence of visible fighting. It must also mean the possibility of living with dignity, imagining a future, maintaining human relationships and meeting people from other countries without fear or hostility.

I'm from the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country that has experienced decades of conflict. I know that peace is not an abstract idea. It affects education, employment, opportunity and the future of an entire generation.

My experience in Russia has not answered all my questions about the war. It has, however, strengthened my belief that human encounters can help us understand one another. We must be able to acknowledge suffering, challenge stereotypes, ask difficult questions and listen to different experiences while remaining committed to peace.

Peace begins when we recognise one another's humanity, even when our countries are divided.

Prudent Zihahirwa