



# Pax Scotia

Issue 14



## COP26 and Peace

**The effects of climate change** are felt throughout our common home, but most forcefully by the most vulnerable.

Droughts and flash floods cause food instability that leads to cross border and international migration as people move to survive.

Nisreen Elsaim (left), Sudanese youth climate activist and climate negotiator and chair of the UN's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, says:

*'World leaders need to engage with the youth and listen to them. Stop conflict by stopping climate change. Give us security and secure our future.'*

On P2, peace activist Ross Ahlfeld reinforces that plea.

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Police Scotland, and human rights issues  
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**Nisreen Elsaim:** 'Give us security and secure our future.' Is that too much to ask of the delegates who will negotiate at COP26 in Glasgow from October 31- November 12?

## The 'haves' and 'have nots' – a challenge to peace

By Marian Pallister,  
Pax Christi Scotland  
Chair

**The United Nations** Sustainable Development Action Zone recently ran a series of on-line events that looked towards achieving a more equitable and just future. Perhaps you joined some of those events. A phrase that spoke to me from the pre-publicity was 'Every society faces unique challenges, but poverty and inequality are universal.'

It matters little whether you are a nurse in the UK desperately in need of Universal Credit and help from the food bank, or a machinist in a Bangladesh garment factory whose wages reflect the £2 paid for a T-shirt you've sewn. Your problems are the same if you're a chicken farmer in Zambia priced out of the market by Chinese factory farmers or an employee of a multi-national company with a billionaire CEO whose fortune relies on paying low wages and low taxes.

Wherever you are in the world, poverty and inequality are a challenge to peace. The increasing gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' may not lead to outright war, as did the economic disaster suffered by Germany in the wake of the First World War, but that gap does increase instability in any society. It does affect the peace of mind of any individual experiencing exclusion and discrimination because they don't have enough cash to feed the kids or the increasingly hungry electricity meter.

If we look back through history at those times when discrimination has been at its most ugly, we find it went hand in hand with the fear of unemployment, the fear of someone else taking a job, the fear of hunger.

The UN and Pope Francis agree that we have to rebuild a world that designs inclusive economic systems, stronger social protections, and tackles discrimination. And of course, confronts the climate emergency that's exacerbating poverty. It's possible, but *our* voices must be added to those of Pope Francis & the UNSDG programme. For the sake of peace - and peace of mind - let's speak out as members of Pax Christi Scotland.

*Marian Pallister*

# Pax Christi Scotland Peace issues

## The Climate Emergency

*Ross Ahlfeld is member of Pax Christi Scotland and a long-time peace activist. As we approach COP26, this 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (to be held in Glasgow between 31 October and 12 November) is seen by many to be the world's last chance to get climate change under control. In 2015, countries committed under the Paris Agreement to bring forward national plans setting out how much they would reduce their emissions – known as Nationally Determined Contributions, or 'NDCs'. Some countries have reneged on that agreement, others have simply slipped behind with their commitments. Here, Ross makes the links between peace and climate change and asks us to act and pray.*

**The hour is late** so I won't mince my words - addressing climate change is inexorably tied to achieving peace and economic social justice, as entrenched militarism and oligarchic power structures are prioritising capital over the planet, and marginalised communities will absorb the worst effects if we don't act.

These are the blunt facts of the matter: catastrophic environmental destruction is an act of war and violence against God's creation. Six million of the Creator's creatures are on the brink of extinction. If we do not act now then 30% of all humanity will be forced to flee from the coasts, creating hundreds of millions of new refugees. That has to result in hundreds of new conflicts over land and water.

Our collective insanity and the blasphemy that we are committing are almost beyond imagining. We are bringing death to the earth through war, militarism and violence. Add to that, mining for fossil fuels, oil, gas and coal raises the temperature and ocean levels, causing super storms, droughts, famine, floods and fire.

Indeed, violence is literally anything that kills and leads to premature death, so when we Christians speak of nonviolence we must speak of all things.

As peacemakers, we are called by the likes of Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King and Dorothy Day to commit ourselves to all creative, active movements of nonviolence. Just as we once marched with the labour and trade union movement, the civil right movement, the women's movement, and the anti war movement, now we must go all in with the environmental movement to create the biggest drive for change the world has ever seen. It is the same cause – the cause of witnessing to our faith in Jesus by actively confronting the culture of violence!

Nor can we retreat into despair. We are reminded by contemporary Christian peacemakers and activists such as the UK's Chris Cole and the US's John Dear to continue to heed God's call to 'be not afraid' and keep the faith. We cannot be overcome by fear and division or become despondent; we must believe in the God of life amid destruction.

The greatest challenge is to believe that together we have power, the power not to give in and accept that violence and environmental destruction is natural or unavoidable.

Most of all, we must pray for the strength to persevere, as without prayer we are lost. As the American theologian Ched Myers says, 'To pray is to resist the despair by which the powers rule in our hearts and our world.'

*Ross Ahlfeld*

## Sri Lanka and Police Scotland

*Pax Christi Scotland's campaign to halt Police Scotland's role in training personnel from countries where human rights violations are alleged continues with the support of MSP Mercedes Villalba, who has presented a number of questions to the Scottish Justice Minister and to Police Scotland. We asked her to give us her thoughts...*

**The concerns** that have been expressed about Police Scotland's training programme with the Sri Lankan Police strike at the very heart of the Scottish Government's claim to be a champion for international human rights.



Sri Lanka had a historically poor record on human rights, but reports suggest that the situation has worsened since President Rajapaksa came to power in 2019. There is a fear that human rights abuses such as the use of torture and state-sanctioned surveillance of human rights defenders are occurring with an increasing regularity.

That's why I find the position of both the Scottish Government and Police Scotland to be increasingly unsustainable when they argue that the training programme with the Sri Lankan Police is underpinned by human rights considerations.

Though Police Scotland is allegedly helping the Sri Lankan Police to tackle gender-based violence, this claim was undermined when a Sri Lankan Police spokesperson confirmed that cases of intimate partner violence will not be taken to court.

I am concerned that Police Scotland's work could be serving to give both political cover and legitimacy to those who continue to perpetrate human rights abuses in Sri Lanka. It's for that reason I am pleased that Police Scotland have confirmed the programme has been suspended since May and that the British High Commission is now undertaking a review.

For this review to be credible, it must listen to the concerns about human rights that have been raised by campaign organisations such as Pax Christi Scotland. The review cannot seek to give a clean bill of health to Police Scotland's work in Sri Lanka without seriously addressing these issues.

However, the Scottish Government's Justice Secretary Keith Brown must also be held to account for his failure to provide political leadership on this issue and take a strong stance against the activities of Police Scotland's International Development and Innovation Unit. They are not just providing training to Sri Lanka, but also to some of the world's worst alleged human rights abusers including Qatar, Colombia, and the UAE.

If the Scottish Government is serious about promoting human rights internationally, they must start at home. That means we need a wholesale review of the activities of Police Scotland's International Development and Innovation Unit and an immediate suspension of its work with those countries that engage in human rights abuses and repressions.

I will continue to fight for this in Parliament.

*Mercedes Villalba*

**On November 25**, Pax Christi Scotland will hold a Zoom event to mark the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

It will focus on the violence experienced by women in Sri Lanka, despite Police Scotland's claim to have trained forces there in issues of gender equality.

To accommodate speakers in Sri Lanka, it will begin at 1pm UK time. Please make a note in your diaries.

### More questions about Sri Lanka and Police Scotland

Questions regarding a pause in Police Scotland's work with Sri Lankan officers have attracted media attention. While the Scottish Justice Minister has maintained that this pause was due to COVID19, Police Scotland (see Mercedes Villalba's comments left) say a review is underway.

On September 22, Kenny MacAskill, MP for East Lothian, raised the issue of Police Scotland's involvement in Sri Lanka in the House of Commons.

He addressed a written question to the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, asking on what date the British High Commission in Colombo formally notified Sri Lanka's Inspector General of Police that Police Scotland had decided to pause its programme of work with Sri Lanka.

Amanda Milling, Minister of State (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office) responded: "The British High Commission in Colombo formally notified Sri Lanka's Inspector General of Police that Police Scotland had decided to pause its programme of work with Sri Lanka on 2 July 2021. The training has focused on developing community policing, supporting women in the Sri Lankan police service, and improving the response to sexual and gender-based violence."

Training is currently under review & no travel to Sri Lanka has been undertaken during COVID.



## **Pax Christi Scotland**

***Engaging with the world, seeking peace***

***Some important dates for your diary***

### **Gender violence – no place in our world**

**While there** can be no doubt that Police Scotland intended to promote human rights and gender equality when it undertook to train officers from the Sri Lankan security forces, sadly, as you will have read elsewhere in this edition, the Sri Lankans have not followed through and human rights violations are escalating according to UN and Human Rights Watch sources.

That, of course, is why we have campaigned on this issue, and will continue to do so. We have joined forces with the Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice, with Freedom From Torture, and with Human Rights Watch. We have involved Members of the Scottish Parliament, including Mercedes Villalba who has asked a number of questions on our behalf and has also written to the Chief Constable on this issue.

Many reports say that the justice system in Sri Lanka doesn't see gender based violence as a problem.

With this in mind, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (**November 25**) our speakers in Sri Lanka and the UK will help us better understand a complex situation. There will be reminders, but register at:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZArfu2vqjooH92Lq\\_FPBhsr30wl-0\\_Oj2MS](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZArfu2vqjooH92Lq_FPBhsr30wl-0_Oj2MS)

This Zoom meeting will be at 13h UK time for those joining from Sri Lanka.



### **Climate, weapons of mass destruction – and ethics for peace**

**On the International Day for Peace**, Pax Christi Scotland's Zoom event brought together four speakers who explored the ethics of investment in fossil fuels and nuclear weapons.

They were Fr Gerry Maguiness, now heading the Scottish Bishops' Conference Care of Creation Office, Quintin Rayer, head of research and ethical investment at P1 Investment Management, Alice Kooij, who steers Pax Christi International's Working Group on the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty, and Susi Snyder, who coordinates Don't Bank On The Bomb's research and campaigns and works with PAX and ICAN to build support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons across the business sector.

*A distinguished panel, and you can catch up with them on our YouTube channel if you missed the event* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoYDD6HDoiY>).

Among the many comments we received was one that read 'I am seeing the links between all the individual strands of climate change, nuclear weapons, poverty, exploitation of people and planet, destruction of habitats, vaccine greed during the pandemic and fossil fuel damage and joining them all together like a giant "join the dots" puzzle. And I am beginning to see that the solutions are all inter related and inter dependent as well.' Pax Christi Scotland aims to bring experts together to 'join the dots' on all issues of peace that concern our society.

**\*Our AGM will be held on line in November.**

### **Our website & our postal address**

Blogs, podcasts, 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 Computers -

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

**See our change of postal address below left.**

### **Where to find Pax Christi Scotland:**

[www.paxchristiscotland.org](http://www.paxchristiscotland.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/PaxChristiScotland>

[@PaxScotland](#) (Twitter)

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Pax Christi Scotland now has a Youtube Channel where you can find recordings of past events. Find us at:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCcmLpQv27Py\\_ul14szp95g](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCcmLpQv27Py_ul14szp95g)

If you subscribe to the channel (just click on the word 'Subscribed'), you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.