

Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions

“Integral ecology: overcoming the social and environmental crisis”

International Workshop and General Assembly, Brussels and Leuven - 1--4 Oct 2021

FINAL DECLARATION

***Structural change is necessary for the respect of our Common Home.
The ecological transition has started. It must be fair and just.
We can support and accelerate it. And we will!***

We, delegates from 21 European Justice & Peace Commissions, came together in person and online for the Annual International Workshop and General Assembly held in Belgium from 1 to 4 October 2021, to fulfil our responsibility for exploring contributions to the ecological transition.

The Workshop, co-organised and co-hosted by the Flemish and French-speaking Justice and Peace Commissions in Belgium, was based on Cardinal Cardijn’s methodology of “See, Judge, Act”¹.

The opening ceremony offered us the opportunity to tackle the topic: *The Ecological Transition: Limits and Opportunities* through three keynote discussions.

In his lecture, Prof Jean-Pascal Van Ypersele delivered the scientific point of view, summarizing the essential truth about climate change in ten words and five key points : it’s real (global warming is happening), it’s us (human activity is the main cause), experts agree (there’s a scientific consensus), it’s bad (the impacts are serious and affecting people) but there’s hope (we have the technology needed to alleviate the worst impacts). He also outlined objectives to address the issue in various domains (economy, sustainability, energy efficiency, buildings insulation, mobility, finance, food, and agriculture).

Mrs Zakia Khattabi, Belgian Minister of Climate, starting with the ecological disasters of this last summer, explained why the Green Deal is the most appropriate response to the crisis and, according to her, a refounding act of the European project. The transition needs to be fair because the poorest people are the least responsible for the climate emergency and yet it is they who are the most affected.

Concluding the interventions, Nicolas Van Nuffel moved the audience by reminding us how the younger generation is fighting for its future, but how rage on their part could turn to despair as the curve of progress is insufficient and too slow. However, he also demonstrated how mobilization works and how the international dialogue is scaling up in its ambitions, methods and results.

Progressing to the “Judge” part of the program, participants explored three areas in greater depth: the transition needs to be fair and just (leaving no one behind); care for Creation is an essential dimension of our spirituality; and a systemic change will starts first in our hearts and daily lives.

¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, n° 4 ; *Octogésima Adveniens*, n° 4

During the third part of the Workshop, participants undertook five field visits in Brussels, Leuven and Liège to step into the “Act” dimension. They discovered and got to know how local initiatives are dealing with the social and environmental crisis. These community organizations are daily and concretely contributing to sustainability and solidarity (with the creation a dignified life for the isolated or excluded people in the House of Compassion in St-John-the-Baptist Church, with the use and re-use of tools in Tournevie, with the youngsters’ education in Studio Globo, with a community-supported agriculture in de Boeren Companie, with homeless women in Casa de Bethanie).

These projects were viewed through the prism of the 7 Laudato Si goals : response to the Cry of the Earth, response to the Cry of the Poor, ecological economy, adoption of simple lifestyles, ecological education, ecological spirituality and community engagement, and participatory action.

All through their discoveries and learnings, the participants were invited to move from reflection to action. On a personal level by their wishes to adopt new behaviors, on the level of their own National Justice and Peace Commission by summarizing the ideas they will share back home and, finally by what they suggest as concrete courses of action to the European Network of Justice and Peace.

At the conclusion of this International Workshop, the participants emphasized that:

- the will for change exists, especially on the part of the younger generation. Their call must be heard or their anger will turn into despair.
- we have, in our culture, our experience, our intellectual tools, and our spiritual references the resources to overcome climate change. Among these, Laudato Si and Fratelli Tutti provide guidance and practical steps to undertake a just transition.
- change is possible for each person, but it has to come from within. Change requires introspection, listening, looking and persistence. Telling the truth is the first part of the healing process. It requires presence and the ability to see what IS. Being together in ways which transcend traditional patterns of consumption (as exemplified in Casa Bethania initiative) puts the person back at the heart of the relationship.
- the poorest people, especially in the developing countries, are the first victims of climate change. Their situation must not be worsened by the transition; It is our duty to make sure they will be protected, they can participate and be empowered..

We commit ourselves to start implementing the transition at our personal level. But it is not enough. We also call for systematic change at the political level. The change of our own behaviors will make our requests more relevant and more coherent.

- We ask Catholic Educational institutions to continue developing educational tools and research, to provide knowledge and training that will enable people to be part of the transition. For instance, to urgently introduce organic farming in the curriculum, if not already undertaken, and to formally recognize the empirical evidence that organic farming can provide enough food for all.
- We ask the Church to continue showing leadership and providing examples of compassion and inspiration, particularly involving young people, in local parishes.
- We call on decision makers and political leaders to put people before economic gain, to urgently take the necessary measures to avoid environmental and social disaster, and to create the conditions for the essential ecological transition.

Leuven, 4 October 2021

Justice and Peace Europe is the alliance of 32 national Justice and Peace Commissions in Europe, working for the promotion of justice, peace, respect for human dignity and better care of the environment. The Conference promotes and raises awareness of the Catholic social teaching in European societies and among the European institutions. Justice and Peace is in regular contact with the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and sees itself as part of the worldwide Justice and Peace family.

Contact: secretary@jupax-europa.org - www.juspax-eu.org