

Farewell Speech of Cardinal Godfried Danneels As International Pax Christi President, 1990 - 1999

My brother and sisters I greet you in the name of God, Creator of all, of Jesus, Peacemaker and Redeemer, of the Holy Spirit who instills in us all the desire for and the courage to work for justice. It is good that we are gathered here in Amman. It is good too, that we will go together to Jerusalem, Holy ground of the three great monotheistic faith traditions. I come before you today to reflect upon the past nine years of Pax Christi International's work; to focus the current world situation, and to offer a challenge as we look forward to the great Jubilee 2000, the dawning of a new millennium.

1990 in Vienna I was elected International President of Pax Christi, succeeding one of the great Church leaders of our day, Cardinal Franz König. The collapse of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing changes in political posturing in 1989 and the early 1990 's ushered in what was hoped would be a new period in history. But this 'post-cold war period', heralded by many as 'a new world order' holding out as hope and promise for a more peaceful world, proved not to be that at all. The words 'new world order' were hardly spoken before the world witnessed tensions and violence in the Baltic republics, the traumatic and unprepared break-up of the Soviet Union, and the tragic wars against the people of Iraq and Kuwait. Pax Christi International and its national sections joined others in working actively to be a voice and presence for peace where tensions and wars raged.

During this decade of 'post-cold war' realignment, new threats and risks emerged even as old one continued to fester and erupt. Even though political marginalization of nuclear weapons diminished the risk of an outbreak of global nuclear war among the world's nuclear super powers, still the danger of proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction remains. As proof of point we need only reflect on the recent stand-off between Pakistan and India. In the name of Pax Christi International I went to Geneva in April 1998. Together with the World Council of Churches, Pax Christi International questioned the morality of nuclear deterrence. And together with other NGOs, Pax Christi was instrumental in the birth of the campaign to ban the anti-personnel land mines. While our successful efforts should inspire us to continue the course of opposition to any form of nuclear proliferation, we should also take courage in moving forward confidently in our opposition to the manufacture, sale and use of small arms and light weapons. Surely, disarmament and demilitarisation continues to be a significant agenda item for our movement.

There are other threats to world peace and security. Regional conflicts and civil wars increasingly destabilise and bring about increased suffering for the people so often at the mercy of unconscionable and greedy leaders. Nation State sovereignty and political self-interest often seems to hamper early intervention by the United Nations in alleviating or eliminating the political conditions that end up in regional and civil conflict. Often NGOs within and outside of the regions or nations in conflict are the ones working to prevent the outbreaks of violence, and when violence does erupt, the NGOs are often the strongest voices in working for resolution and restoration of peace based on justice for all people. Pax Christi International has consistently been an active NGO. During a visit to Rwanda in 1993 I witnessed Pax Christi working there. No one could have predicted the terrible disaster that took place just one year later. The United Nations seemed powerless to prevent and then to stop the genocide that took the lives of thousands of people, many of our Pax Christi friends among them.

The nineteen nineties will be remembered as a decade of terrible wars in the Balkans: East Slavonia, Krajina, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1999 we witnessed the escalating violence in Kosovo ending in 78 days of NATO led bombing. Pax Christi International Youth Forum along with other organisations initiated a dialogue project. They warned of mounting tensions and the potential for violence. But the warnings fell on deaf ears. Nonetheless, I sincerely hope that the good work of the Youth Forum of Pax Christi will continue and grow stronger. Many of our national sections, the international movement, and affiliated groups within the region have been and are still heavily involved in work on Yugoslavia. I have personally made a number of visits to the former Yugoslavia to listen and to talk with many people, including religious leaders from all traditions. Together with members of the staff and experts from our movement we have conducted 'shuttle diplomacy' in the different capitals of the region. I cannot forget the contacts we had with Patriarch Pavle and Cardinal Kuharic as well as with representatives from different religious communities. I expect that these contacts will be intensified as the difficult process of peace building begins in Kosovo, Serbia and throughout the entire region. Our work is not only in the Balkans. In 1993 members of the national sections and the International Secretariat went to Haiti. They listened to the Haitian people's cry for justice. Pax Christi's International Executive Committee spent long hours and difficult debating issues pertaining to Haiti. Today the situation in Haiti remains fragile. Our work is not finished there.

In 1994 I led a Pax Christi delegation to southern Sudan where arbitrary arrest, torture, execution and disappearances are a way of life. Through the process of Islamisation, the Sudanese government is attempting to impose a uniform national identity on the traditionally multi-cultural society in southern Sudan. This leaves many Christians feeling persecuted and abandoned. I remember vividly the experience and the images of the people in southern Sudan. We invited Bishop Paride Taban to our 50th anniversary Council in Assisi. This was our small effort in support of the initiatives for peace within the New Sudan Council of Churches.

I have mentioned only a few of the direct involvement of Pax Christi responding to requests for support from groups and individuals within various countries. There are many more. Pax Christi is asked to help prevent violence, to end grave injustices non-violently, or to rebuild peace following years of violence and destruction. Our work in Central America led to a number of initiatives throughout our movement. Over the past nine years we have welcomed new national sections and associated groups into Pax Christi International. Many organisations and individuals have asked to be affiliated with Pax Christi International. We have made numerous interventions at the United Nations Commission for Human Rights. Initiatives were taken to strengthen local capacities for peace in Columbia, Sudan and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Sometimes these efforts resulted in visible effects. But all too often these efforts failed to involve the international community in effective ways to prevent violence. Both our success and our failure to achieve our goal for peace and non-violence teach us that we must strengthen our efforts in the years to come. We must continue to work toward a political will among members states of the UN so the UN will itself be more effective in dealing with matters of internal conflicts and massive violations of human rights. We must intensify our efforts toward the understanding that the supremacy of law must be accepted and the principles of non-intervention in internal affairs should be scrutinised so that effective UN intervention at early stages of conflict becomes possible. Members of our Executive Committee, especially those from the South, will continue to play a crucial role in all of these developments within our movement.

From a culture of violence to a culture of peace.

In a world where many regions suffer from increasing tensions, conflicts and violence, making peace a tangible reality is of critical importance. Ethno-nationalism, xenophobia, racism and discrimination against minority groups, religious extremism and violation of human rights are increasingly the cause of local and regional conflicts. Violence fueled by hatred and directed against non-nationals, refugees, asylum seekers and immigrant workers is a serious threat to domestic security. Pax Christi International has increased its work in each of these areas. Four position papers have been produced on different aspects of the refugee problem. These papers have been instrumental in influencing governmental and intergovernmental bodies. In the future our movement will need to focus in more specific terms on the questions of racism and discrimination. Racism and discrimination often have deep cultural roots. All too often religion, especially religious nationalism, is used to legitimise and make acceptable racist policies and discriminatory practices.

In the coming years Pax Christi should put more emphasis on integrating into its own work the foundations and principles of UNESCO's programme "A Culture for Peace". The Great Jubilee 2000 offers a good context for this focus. I am sure that our International Youth Forum will make its own contribution to building this Culture of Peace programme. There have been the annual peace routes and specific seminars like those held in Northern Ireland and Bosnia led by the Youth Forum. It is important to encourage the growth and strengthening of the national youth forums within the national sections. Each of us, and especially the young people in our movement must truly become 'agents for peace in the future'. Indeed, we all need to work towards a new culture based on non-violence, tolerance, mutual understanding and solidarity. We must find ways to solve disputes and conflicts peacefully. The world is in need of such a new culture and a common system of values. As a human community we desperately need new behavioural patterns for individuals, groups and nations, grounded in mutual respect for the dignity of all people and built on foundations of justice and right relationships. Without these, we will never realise true international peace and a cessation of war and rumours of war.

Role of Religions

True spiritual awakening and organised religion are vital instruments in achieving peace. Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue is needed. These efforts must be intensified in a truly new culture which need to be rooted in the minds and hearts of ordinary women and men. This is a vast area for increased activity. I would like to mention just two areas where Pax Christ is already deeply involved.

We, as a movement, have had long-standing contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church. These contacts have been important in bridging gaps between the Churches. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church faced enormous problems and difficulties. Together with Cardinal Hume, recently deceased, I had the privilege to hear directly from Patriarch Alexy about the complex history and the serious situation of that Church in today's context. I am happy and grateful that these personal discussions will be followed up. The Russian Orthodox Church has invited Pax Christi and myself to meet with their leaders in September. The purpose of the future dialogue is to renew our mutual commitment to co-operation. Perhaps it would be beneficial to involve the Serbian Orthodox Church in a three-way dialogue: A Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox and Serbian Orthodox dialogue.

Another and continuing challenge for the future is dialogue with other religious traditions, especially Judaism and Islam. The Council of Amman/Jerusalem and the many contacts we have made before and during these days witness our sincere hope and efforts to strengthen co-operation among the three monotheistic religions. I am convinced that through stronger inter-religious co-operation a hope and promise of a better and more peaceful world can be realised. Inter-religious / inter-faith dialogue is truly one way to peace. There are so many areas where the challenge to continue, to deepen and to strengthen inter-religious / inter-faith dialogue exists: One current example is the situation in India and Pakistan where such dialogue at both religious and political levels could be beneficial to all.

We are meeting in a beautiful region of the world – a region blessed with natural wonders of mountains, deserts, life-giving rivers, and precious natural resources. It is also an ecological environment that is fragile and delicate. Like so many other regions, the sensitive and delicate ecological balance is upset and destroyed by war, wanton greed, unjust domination over resources that belong to all and uncontrolled plundering. But just as there are elements of destruction so, too, there are many who make monumental efforts to educate others to care for the whole of creation. There are those whose scientific knowledge, financial resources and personal energies are spent unselfishly to assure a future for all of creation, and for the children of the people of God. In recent years Pax Christi international has committed itself as a movement to increase its own awareness of ecological and environmental concerns and to live that awareness in specific actions. There is so much yet to be done! May the challenge continue to spur us on.

Today people in the poorer nations of the world suffer inordinately due to heavy burdens of international debt. The problem has, for many, risen to crisis proportions. I strongly support all efforts to attain relief from these debt burdens. The world-wide movement, Jubilee 2000 project seeks to do just that. This effort is linked integrally to the essence of what Pope John Paul II in Tertio Millennium refers to as the Great Jubilee – a Holy Year of Jubilee. Please continue to participate in the Jubilee 2000 campaign to bring about a fair and equitable relief of the third world debt crisis.

I would also reiterate, along with the Holy Father, the plea for a moratorium on the death penalty throughout the world. Let modern states seek and find other, more humanly constructive ways to ensure the security of their citizens. The Great Jubilee Year 2000 is an excellent time to cease use of the death penalty, which does nothing but make the state party to the very crime it pretends to punish.

Role within the Church

In the past nine years we have witnessed the growth of our movement from a mainly West European / North American movement to one that encompasses East and South. This means that our movement reflects more accurately a strong voice for peace in our church throughout the world. Many of the new sections, associated and affiliated groups became interested in Pax Christi in order to strengthen their capacity to work more effectively as a peace presence within the local church and society. I am convinced that Pax Christi International plays a very important and independent role within our Church throughout the world. In his speech of 29 May 1995, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Pax Christi International, Pope John Paul II said: "Movements like yours are precious. They help draw people's attention to the violence, which shatters the harmony between human beings, which is at the heart of creation. They help to develop conscience so that justice and the search for the common good can prevail in the relations between individuals and peoples. These are the foundations for a lasting peace. (Cf. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II-II 29, a 2, ad 3; Centisimus Annus, n 5; Catechism of

the Catholic Church nn 2303-2317).” I fully agree with these words of the Holy Father and would like to add from my experience that Pax Christi can play this role in an effective way because it is an independent and democratic movement where clergy, religious and lay people work together for the sake of peace and justice.

Finally, let me say that here at our Council of Amman / Jerusalem we give witness to the wide diversity of our movement. I have mentioned only a few of our many and diverse activities – efforts that I have been privileged to be a part of during these past nine years. It is a great consolation to realise that our Executive Committee has become truly international: all regions and continents are represented on that body. I wish to thank all those who are leaving their time of service with the Executive Committee (Marjolein Schuurmans, Kathleen Pruitt, Joaquim Pinto de Andrade and Dom Orlando Dotti) I attest to the spirit of co-operation within the Executive Committee. Work has been accomplished in a spirit of collaboration and in a constructive and positive climate, even when there were difficult issues and not all members saw matters in exactly the same way. I also want to welcome all the newly elected members of the Executive Committee (Msgr. Laurent Monsengwo, Marie Dennis, Maria Julia Hernandez and Katarina Kruhonja) and encourage each of you to contribute your own individual gifts and talents to furthering the work of this important group. I also want to welcome and congratulate our newly elected International President, Patriarch Michel Sabbah. May you be servant leader within our International movement.

And now I wish to share a word of farewell to my direct work within our movement. I have learned much and I have grown together with all of you. It has been a privilege to serve this wonderful faith-based movement for peace and justice. I am certainly willing to continue to assist the movement wherever and however I can. I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to thank very warmly Etienne De Jonghe, Greet Vanaerschot, Paul Lansu and their team of dedicated volunteers from the International Secretariat in Brussels. Thanks to their enormous commitment to our movement, I have been able to serve Pax Christi for the past nine years. So, farewell and God bless all of you!

+ Cardinal Godfried Danneels

Amman, 29 June 1999