

Water: Source of Life – Human Right and Europe’s responsibility

***International Workshop of Justice and Peace Europe from 28 to 30
September 2018 in Barcelona***

Final Statement

Water is the source of life on earth. We need to take care of it as individual persons and through our public institutions at each political level. Access to clean water and sanitation is a human right and Christians are invited to engage for its full recognition by states and international organisations.

These are the key messages of the annual International Workshop of the European Conference of Justice and Peace commissions (Justice and Peace Europe) from 28 to 30 September in Barcelona. More than sixty delegates representing 20 commissions were present at the event, which was also an occasion to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Spanish Justice and Peace Commission and the Justice and Peace Commission of Barcelona.

At the opening ceremony of the International Workshop and in the presence of Cardinal Juan Jose Omella, Archbishop of Barcelona, and the president of Justice and Peace Europe Archbishop Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxemburg. Dr Jaume Saura, professor of international law and deputy general of the Catalan Ombudsman and key-note speaker of the ceremony qualified the right to water as an emerging human right. Its essential elements are availability, safety, acceptance, accessibility, affordability and non-discrimination. He invited Justice and Peace Europe to be a drop of water in the current stream of initiatives all over the world in order to achieve the formal recognition of the right to water.

In the opening lecture of the second day of the International Workshop Dr Pedro Arrojo, university professor, environmentalist and member of the Spanish parliament, recalled that worldwide 10.000 people die every day because of the lack of safe access to clean water and that 100 million people in the wider Europe have no access to clean drinking water. He called for a change of paradigm in relation to water from domination to sustainability, from water resource management to caretaking of an ecosystem. Water should not be privatised but treated as a common good, which needs to be managed in a sustainable way in order to make it available to all. Mrs. Miriam Planas from the local platform “Agua es vida” added a local perspective to the lecture of Dr. Arrojo. The platform engages itself in the “remunicipalisation” of water services, which have been privatised in the past 150 years.

Tebaldo Vinciguerra, who works with the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting the Integral Human Development, gave the second main lecture of the International Workshop. He introduced the perspective of the social teaching of the Church according to which the right to water is

included in the list of human rights. Safe access to clean water derives from the dignity of every human person and for the Holy See water is an essential element of life. In order to preserve it personal responsibilities must be fostered and structural efforts redoubled. Mr. Vinciguerra finally insisted on the sacramental dimension of water in the liturgy of the Church. The religious dimension of water is present in all world religions. Water can therefore become an important vector for interreligious dialogue.

After these lectures participants met in small working groups to discuss national experiences of the right to water, the duties deriving from it and further socio-ethical dimensions of water. Among others they hinted

- to conflict and violence because of water issues;
- to missing or out-dated infrastructures for the distribution and sanitation of water;
- to the need for individual change of behaviour exemplified by the use of bottled water despite of the availability of good quality tap water;
- to the need for the exchange of good practises among the members of the network;
- to the lack of awareness about the human right to water and the need to foster educational programs;
- to the international dimension of the right to water and the numerous and serious breaches of this right on other continents and the importance of next year's Synod of Bishops on the Amazon, which should be a good occasion to promote the need for international solidarity in relation to the right to water.

Both the environmental and the social aspects of the right to water were also evoked in a symbolic action¹ on Saturday afternoon with the inauguration of a fountain in Sts Cosmas and Damian parish of El Prat de Llobregat and a meditative walk through the delta of the Llobregat river as well as during a visit to the Saint Anna Church in the centre of Barcelona, which the archdiocese of Barcelona has missioned to welcome homeless people.

On the last day of the International Workshop the current chair of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance Prof. Jean-Paul Lehnars delivered the annual Justice and Peace Europe lecture on "Christian Values and Human Rights: myth or reality in troubled times". He invited his audience to define their values, to engage with others in human rights networks and to insist on rights that have a priority for Christians like the social rights and the right to life, to which the still emerging right to water can be linked.

The International Workshop of Justice and Peace Europe ended with the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, which was presided by Cardinal Juan Jose Omella. In the Sunday gospel the participants read: "Anyone who gives a cup of water to drink...will surely not lose his reward." (Mc, 9,41)

Barcelona, 30 September 2018

¹ The symbolic action was co-organised with the Global Catholic Climate Movement. For further information see the related press release.