FOR A PEACE THAT DOES NOT BETRAY JUSTICE

Appeal of the scholars gathered in Rome, 5 and 6 November 2026

International Conference "Peace at the Crossroads of a Troubled World"
Eastern Christians, Conflicts and Peacebuilding
Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome
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To His Holiness Pope Leo XIV

Most Holy Father,

Gathered in Rome for an international conference on Eastern Christians, conflicts and peacebuilding, we are scholars from several countries, most of us from Catholic universities, coming from different disciplines and traditions.

Faced with the wars tearing apart the Middle East, Eastern Europe and so many other regions of the world, we refuse to let peace remain an ideal that is proclaimed and endlessly deferred.

Eastern Christians have something to say to the world. They know war and displacement. But they also know coexistence, dialogue and fidelity. Their experience can change the way we think about peace.

We do not claim to speak in place of the victims. But their suffering cannot be merely an object of study. It obliges us to question our teaching, our research, our institutions and our own responsibility.

We consider that a Catholic university cannot be content with understanding the mechanisms of war, and that it must also help to think through the conditions of peace and to defend human dignity, without distinction of origin, religion or conviction.

We reject a peace without justice, an international order without respect for law, a faith that justifies violence, and knowledge that remains indifferent to human suffering.

From this conviction, twelve commitments arise.

EDUCATING TO LIBERATE

1. Forming consciences, not partisans

Peace begins where education recognizes the dignity of every person, in their culture, their history and their context of life. We want to teach the causes of conflicts without indoctrination, to learn to discern injustices, to resist prejudice and to settle disputes without violence. May our schools and universities form free consciences, capable of serving the common good and of recognizing a neighbour in the stranger. Education is a right for all, including the poorest.

2. Let those who teach the faith learn to meet the other

Religious ignorance feeds fear, and fear feeds division. We wish to see joint training develop between seminaries, Muslim institutions, notably al-Azhar, and universities, as well as

interreligious workshops for teachers, on citizenship and freedom of conscience. No one should guide consciences without having learned to respect those of others.

3. No longer passing on divisions in the name of history

School can become the place where conflicts are perpetuated from one generation to the next. We ask that history and religious education curricula, where they sustain divisions, be rethought together with teachers, researchers, families and civil society, without imposing an official memory and without passing over recent wars in silence. History and religion must enlighten consciences, not manufacture new enemies.

SEEKING TRUTH, HEALING MEMORIES

4. Making our universities permanent artisans of peace

Peace cannot be the subject of a conference and then disappear from our work. We commit ourselves to working toward the establishment of an international network of universities, open to partners of all traditions, in which theologians, philosophers, historians, legal scholars, scholars of geopolitics, psychologists and social scientists work together, giving a place to a local and contextual theology. Annual programs, summer schools, joint publications and pilot projects among universities on every continent will involve civil society in building citizenship, justice and human fraternity. May the diasporas be genuine actors of peace there.

5. Memory must serve truth, not revenge

The wounds of history are healed neither by forgetting nor by falsification. We want to confront narratives, study antagonistic memories, notably around disputed or shared places such as the Holy Places of Jerusalem or Hagia Sophia, and make sources accessible in their different languages, so as to rediscover also the histories of reconciliation. We also want to edit and distribute in the Middle East a corpus of Syriac and Arabic texts, Christian and Muslim, that affirm the primacy of peace.

6. A ceasefire is not enough to make peace

A society can lay down its arms and remain a prisoner of fear, injustice and mistrust. A genuine peace holds together justice, the security of populations and the rule of law, which are inseparable. We call for the creation, with Christian and Muslim academic institutions, of independent observatories of educational reforms and of contested sites of memory, and we propose a qualitative indicator of peace as a common good, going beyond security indices alone, based on lived justice, social trust, civic participation and cooperation between communities.

MEETING, WELCOMING, RECONCILING

7. Making encounter a practice, not a ceremony

Dialogue between religions and communities, on which the future of humanity depends, cannot be reduced to statements between religious leaders. It must reach schools, neighbourhoods, universities and places of daily life, in trust and mutual esteem. We want to build permanent spaces of encounter and mediation, with Christian and Muslim partners, partners of other traditions and those with no religious affiliation. May international initiatives support local solidarities first.

8. No one should be a stranger to human dignity

Citizenship cannot depend on religion. We defend equality before the law and freedom of conscience, including the freedom to change religion or to practice none. We ask that the reception of refugees rest on national and local legal guarantees rather than on generosity alone, in particular in the light of the solidarity between Poles and Ukrainians. Human dignity must be translated into law.

9. Forgiveness does not abolish justice. It rejects the inevitability of hatred

Crimes must be acknowledged and responsibilities established. Reconciliation cannot be rushed. It requires truth and respect for the victims. But yesterday's wounds must not condemn tomorrow's generations. We invite the Churches to draw from their liturgical traditions the resources of forgiveness and communion, and to institute communal times of reconciliation, for example Eucharistic celebrations bringing together faithful from nations in conflict, with respect for the discipline of each Church. May the memory of suffering become, in the light of the Risen One, a path of forgiveness and rebirth.

SERVING JUSTICE, REFUSING DOMINATION

10. Supporting communities also means enabling them to serve all others

The Christian presence in the East cannot be reduced to a question of survival. Eastern Christians are full citizens of their countries. Their schools and social works already contribute to coexistence between communities, and can help rebuild societies, notably in Syria, where citizenship is at stake. We ask that Christian communities, and first of all their educational institutions, be recognized and supported as partners of peace, according to the principle of subsidiarity and with respect for their autonomy. To take part in the common good is a responsibility.

11. God must never become the alibi for violence

Faith is not a frontier raised against the other. We call on the Churches to move from an identity of protection to an identity of fraternity, to deepen their unity in truth and mutual respect, and to work through their theological divisions from the perspective of a theology of communion. We propose an annual inter-ecclesial seminar devoted to fraternity, power, citizenship and pluralism. Any instrumentalization of religion in the service of aggression, of an imperial project or of political domination must be denounced. The vocation of the Church is to serve peace, not to sacralise power.

12. A peace that abandons the victims is not a just peace

No cause justifies attacks on civilians. From Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Iraq to Israel, Palestine and Gaza, from Ukraine to Nagorno-Karabakh, from Ethiopia to the other wounded regions, the protection of populations and the recognition of their rights must take precedence. In the West Bank, this requirement applies equally to villages, Christian and Muslim alike, threatened by the expansion of settlements and by settler violence. There is no just peace without truth, without law and without calling relations of domination into question. The experience of the war against Ukraine recalls in particular the need to free consciences from imperial and neocolonial narratives. We call on the Churches to take part in this liberation of consciences, to defend the freedom, equality and dignity of every people, and to refuse to become instruments of political or cultural domination.

OUR APPEAL TO THE HOLY FATHER

Most Holy Father,

We respectfully ask you to make peace education a renewed priority of the Church, particularly among young people, teachers and academics.

We respectfully ask you to support the creation of an international network of universities for peace, rooted in Catholic universities and open to other institutions, to continue to make the voice of Eastern Christians and of Eastern Europe heard, and to support their presence, not only as communities to be protected, but as actors of peace, reconstruction and fraternity in pluralistic societies.

Finally, we entrust to you the peoples of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, the Holy Land, Nagorno-Karabakh, Ethiopia, Ukraine and the other regions struck by war, leaving to your discernment the gestures of closeness and peace that you deem appropriate, including a visit to them, when this becomes possible for you.

These gestures do not replace diplomatic action. They show that the Church remains at the side of those whom war strikes, and that no suffering must be abandoned to indifference.

OUR COMMITMENT

We do not wish to add one more declaration to so many others.

For our part, we commit ourselves to working toward the establishment of this network of universities for peace, to setting up joint training programs, to conducting shared research on memories, history curricula, peace education and international governance, to bringing this research to decision-making bodies, and to supporting local peace initiatives with civil society. We will strive to involve our institutions in this. We thus wish to support and complement existing initiatives, by bringing what is distinctive to this network, the perspective and experience of Eastern Christians.

This conference is only a beginning. It brings together mainly Catholic universities. We plan to continue this work, in the coming years, with an ecumenical conference with Protestants and Orthodox, then an interreligious conference with the major religions, in order to think about peace together, first among Christians, then with believers of other traditions.

Peace is not only what we ask of political and religious leaders. **It is also what we must build, where we teach, where we research, where we live.**

We do not ask for peace for our own people. We call for peace for all.

And we take our part in this commitment.

SIGNATORIES

The signatories speak in a personal capacity. Their institution is mentioned for identification only.

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