

A Gift to all Humankind

Statement of Justice and Peace Europe on the Occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

70 years ago, on the 10th of December 1948 in Paris the member States of the United Nations signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Human Rights existed before this date and only several decades later did the Human Rights movement introduce them into the larger political debate. However, in 1948 Human Rights were declared universal and, thus, became a gift to all humankind. For this reason it is fitting to celebrate the 70th anniversary and with this statement the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (Justice and Peace Europe) intends to renew its commitment to the promotion of Human Rights, their indivisibility and universality, especially in this period of their questioning.

Celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is first of all a renewal of our personal commitment to Human Rights. It involves not only defending our own rights, but also the rights of the other. Our commitment creates moral obligations for us personally. The promotion of Human Rights is an indispensable human attitude for us all.

Celebrating the 70th anniversary also means recalling that the recognition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an obligation to public authorities at all levels. As *Justice and Peace Europe* we especially cherish the values expressed by the Council of Europe in the European Convention of Human Rights and the European Union in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Celebrating the 70th anniversary offers an opportunity to affirm the equal importance of social rights and personal rights and freedoms. The interdependence and indivisibility of human rights as particularly asserted at the *Vienna Human Rights Conference (1993)* is also fundamental in Catholic Social Teaching. To overcome new social divisions and rifts in our societies and the populist politics thriving in part on them is of particular importance today.

Celebrating the 70th anniversary inspires us furthermore to renew our call for a legally binding text at the level of the United Nations, which regulates in international Human Rights law the activities of transnational corporations and other enterprises. Indeed, multinational companies have acquired in recent years considerable economic and also political power, which implies an increased responsibility on their side for the full respect of the entire corpus of Human Rights in all their activities.

Celebrating the 70th anniversary alerts us as well to new forms of violation of the dignity of the human person in our rapidly changing world. Following Pope Francis and in line with his encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* we call for the full recognition of a universal right to water and sanitation. Water is the source of all forms of life and depriving people from access to clean water is a denial of the right to life. Other environmental Human Rights might be formulated in the future in the same way as social Human Rights have developed starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself, which already recognized the right to social security, the right to work, the right to rest and leisure and an adequate standard of living as well as the right to education.

Celebrating the 70th anniversary therefore is at the same time a renewal of our commitment to social equality, affordable housing, employment, a healthy life and hospitality for those who are in existential need. It inspires our engagement for freedom of expression and for freedom of religion, for democracy and for the common good. It calls us to strengthen our struggle against xenophobia, intolerance and exacerbated forms of nationalism.

Celebrating the 70th anniversary also calls for an acknowledgement that Human Rights need strong moral foundations both nationally and globally. The concrete practise of respect for human dignity on the part of individual persons, civil society, the Churches and other institutions is a precondition for the legal provisions, which underpin Human Rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself remains a pathfinding gift for all humankind.

Paris, 7th of December 2018

The Executive Committee of *Justice and Peace Europe*