

DECLARATION

12th Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany

at its 6th session

Church on the Path of Justice and Peace

“Depart from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it” (Ps 34:14)

As Christians we enter into the peace of God through worship and prayer, and have a part in God’s peace moving into the world. This peace movement forms the starting point and core of the peace theology and peace ethics that we as Christian churches contribute to the struggle for peace on earth.

The peace of God is all-embracing and we enact it in our own specific ways. God’s peace encompasses a life with dignity, protection from violence and stewardship of our natural life support systems. It includes what we do to reduce injustice and hardship, strengthen law, and safeguard freedom and cultural diversity. The fundamental difference between our action for peace and the peace of God is that we move from lamenting to praising God. This difference preserves us from regarding any political positions as sacred, including our own. It sets a salutary limit on our human disagreements. It promotes down-to-earth discernment and enables self-criticism and serenity.

The peace of God overcomes borders, rulers and powers. God stands by the victims. However, that does not happen through an increase of power but through overcoming the logic of power and might - by God becoming human and making the divine self vulnerable in Christ. A new heaven and a new earth, in which “righteousness and peace will kiss each other” (Ps 85:10), is still ahead of us. But we are already shaping a peace order, here and now, with hope and perseverance, with lucidity and courage. Christ is our peace (Eph 2:14). Christ gives us fresh heart through his righteousness and takes us with him on his path. Upright and mature, with our abilities, our resources and also our weaknesses, we are called to find our orientation in Christ’s nonviolent action for peace and to assume responsibility for seeking peace with justice.

30 years ago a peaceful revolution took place in the German Democratic Republic, with people holding lighted candles and praying for peace in packed churches. There was no violence. That was a huge gift, for which we – in both the eastern and western parts of Germany - continue to feel deep gratitude. The Berlin Wall fell, it was possible to overcome the division of Germany and Europe, democracy and freedom were gained. Yet not all the walls have been taken down in people’s minds and hearts, and new ones are being put up.

The end to the confrontation between the Eastern and Western blocs opened the way to an international world order. It was multipolar and a host of other actors started competing with one another alongside the superpowers. New lines of conflict emerged, wars broke out and were fomented. Against this background, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in 2007 committed itself to the ideal of Just Peace in the memorandum “Live from God’s Peace – Care for Just Peace“, expressing a clear preference for nonviolent, civil instruments for resolving conflicts. It underlined the close connection between peace and justice and between peace and law. According to the memorandum, the deployment of “military means” is legitimate exclusively when it is a “lawful use of force”, which happens as a last resort (*ultima ratio*) and is subject to strict criteria. Using force, in itself, is always a sign of failure, and confronts us with the question of whether, before resorting to it, we have done everything to achieve prevention and nonviolent conflict resolution.

Since the EKD's peace memorandum of 2007, the situation has changed again:

- Climate change is depriving people of their livelihoods. That is increasingly leading to violent conflicts within and between states, and is driving people to migrate.
- Global social and economic inequalities are growing.
- Internal conflicts are increasingly turning into wars involving the superpowers and/or neighbouring states.
- International terrorism is changing the nature of conflicts and exacerbating them.
- Spending on weapons and the armed forces is visibly rising.
- Military missions designed to stop human rights violations have a disappointing record.
- Hybrid wars, war in cyber-space, proliferating weapons of mass destruction, and autonomous and partially autonomous weapons systems raise fundamental ethical issues.
- The rules-based multilateral international order is in crisis. Superpowers are terminating international treaties on arms control and calling international agreements into question.
- The increasing number of failed states in many world regions is changing the security policy challenge.
- The social climate is getting rougher, with speech and action becoming more violent.

An international order that is more just, sparing with resources and respectful of the dignity of all people is the most important contribution towards more global security and fewer conflicts. There is no military solution to the important global challenges. They need to be resolved through balanced policy-making, consideration for law, and concern for the well-being of all stakeholders. Above all, however, confronting these challenges calls for a strengthening of mutual trust. Our fellowship in the ecumenical movement helps us to contribute to building confidence. That is why, with churches from all over the world, we have set out on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

1. The path of nonviolence

Experience shows that individuals, communities and states are able to handle problems and conflicts in all areas of societal and political life in a constructive and nonviolent manner. There are tried-and-tested strategies and instruments for finding ways out of violence and guilt, protecting one another from violence and shaping reconciliation processes – in peace times as in crisis and war situations. On the path of justice and peace we hear God's call to nonviolence. We follow Jesus, who responds to violence not with passive indifference or violent aggression but with active nonviolence. This path transforms enmity, overcomes violence, and respects the dignity of all people, including that of opponents.

- The ideal of Just Peace gives pride of place to nonviolence. We want to put that into practice that more and more - in prayer, in our own action for peace and in societal dialogue. We call on those with political responsibility to overcome military force and instruments of war. From the notion of Just Peace follows the principle: "If you want peace, prepare for peace." That is why we do our utmost to promote the prevention and containment of violence.

- Based on positive experience with prevention and civil conflict resolution we are increasing the training and deployment of trained peaceworkers and calling for an upscaling of peace and conflict research, along with the reliable allocation of the necessary funds.
- Prevention is the most sustainable form of securing peace. We therefore call on the German federal government to give priority in its budget – at least two percent of the gross domestic product – for development policy programmes to combat the root causes of violence, for crisis prevention, for nonviolent conflict resolution and for reconstruction in crisis regions.

2. Sustainable development and climate protection for just peace

In 2015 the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). The present state of implementation gives cause for concern. If the international community continues with business as usual we will only reach three of the 169 sub-goals. We are also very far from achieving Goal 16 “Peace, justice and strong institutions”. Two billion people are still undernourished and, particularly in the Global North, we use more resources than we have at our disposal; we are living at the expense of our distant neighbour and upcoming generations.

The disastrous impacts of climate change function as conflict accelerators. They exacerbate existing problems such as hunger or extreme weather events, and those who contribute least to climate change are hardest hit. We are not doing justice to Agenda 2030’s ambition to “leave no one behind”. Because we are not implementing the SDGs consistently we are moving towards an even less peaceful world. Without sustainable development there will be no peace.

The churches can relate this issue to many of their longstanding activities in the conciliar process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. We call for a resolute commitment of policy-makers, the business community and civil society to respect the ecological limits of our earth. Effective climate protection is also a contribution to crisis prevention.

Climate justice is an essential precondition for peace in the world. Hence it is an expression of Christian peace witness not only to work towards implementing the climate goals adopted by the United Nations in Paris in 2015 but also to consistently develop the climate-friendliness of our own church activities.

- We stand up for an ethic, an economy and a lifestyle of enough and for an intertwining of discussions on peace and sustainability in the church and society.
- We support our partner churches and projects worldwide in coping with the impacts of climate change.
- We call on the federal government to finally take decisive action to implement the climate protection goals set out in its coalition agreement. The action taken so far, the legislation passed and the German Sustainability Strategy are far from sufficient.
- We support the federal government’s intention to contribute to crisis prevention by making climate protection the priority of its term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. It should seek new alliances and use innovative formats of multilateral cooperation.

- Further, the federal government must live up to its international responsibility and make adequate long-term provision for financing international climate programmes, in particular for preventing and compensating for climate-related damage and losses.

3. Social peace

We note a growing gap between rich and poor, and social discrimination. Wage dumping and the relocation of jobs, poverty in old age and rising rents are increasingly arousing anxieties in society. It is the church's responsibility to address these problems in order to forestall simplistic, populist argumentation, extremism and the readiness to use violence. To do so, we need to open up spaces for finding constructive solutions. Furthermore, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are placing a strain on the social climate, as are rightwing populism and far-right parties. Our response must be: racism and exclusion contradict the Christian imperative to love our neighbour and respect human dignity. We must not allow coarse language and physical violence to become ways of handling political, ideological and religious disagreements. Religions must not give cause for hate, strife and war. Instead, believers should make the most of the peace potential of religions so that they can serve as instruments of peace.

We encourage congregations and other church institutions to offer themselves as places of reflection and dialogue, to empower people to assert their interests peacefully, and to create opportunities for participation in society, particularly in rural areas. They should foster the forming of alliances to resolve relevant social problems and bridge social divisions, also developing a stance enabling forthright opposition to verbal and physical violence. Christian communities, associations and initiatives can launch and provide spaces for community-building activities. All existing activities along these lines deserve more social attention. The initiators of these activities are coalition partners for shaping the community at large.

- We pledge to support initiatives in the area of peace education, civil conflict resolution and political education and, in particular, to leave room for the political engagement, skills and concerns of young people.
- We call for an expansion of education for peace and democracy in schools and educational institutions.
- We recommend intensifying educational programmes to consolidate the skills needed to handle hate speech and bullying in analog and digital communication.

4. Europe's responsibility for peace

The European Union (EU) "is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights" (Art. 2, TEU - Lisbon Treaty, 2007). It has played a major role in bringing peace and reconciliation among formerly hostile states in Europe and created an area of stability unique in history. We support all forces committed to the EU as a project for peace and reconciliation. We say "yes to a Europe of worldwide solidarity that overcomes indifference and national interests, practises peace and justice, and stands up for the integrity of creation" (Declaration of the 2016 EKD Synod). The EU's strength, as we see it, lies in anticipating crises by civil and diplomatic means, contributing to settling violent conflicts and supporting the reconstruction of societies devastated by war. Lasting peace is not possible unless the security of others is kept in mind. Confidence-building measures and an internationally agreed legal order play a key role in this context.

- Together with other churches in Europe we want to be a clearly audible voice for peace. In European ecumenical organisations, such as the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC), we advocate for these goals as described e.g. in the *Charta Oecumenica* (2001).
- We call on the EU to prioritise support for institutions that promote peace. In coordination with the United Nations, the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, it should systematically expand the instruments for mediation, prevention of violence, civil conflict resolution and follow-up, as well as peace-building, and resource them considerably better.
- We call on the EU to found all its policies, in particular the European Neighbourhood Policy, on fair trade relations, a just agricultural policy and credible climate and environmental policies, in a spirit of peace and global solidarity.
- We call on the EU and its member states to consistently assume its responsibility to protect refugees. EU search and rescue missions at sea are urgently required. There must be safe, legal ways for refugees to enter the EU as well as a Common European Asylum System with fair distribution and the highest possible procedural and reception standards. The right of asylum enshrined in Article 18 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union must be guaranteed. We support the federal government in advocating, in the European context, for the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration as a framework for a joint solution to migration policy issues.
- We call for a more restrictive implementation of the EU rules on arms export control (in harmony with its Council Common Position of December 2008 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment) and a more effective monitoring of compliance. In this matter, all member states are called upon to establish the necessary national legislation and assessment authorities to implement it. We request the federal government to present a law on arms export control in Germany and to argue for it credibly during its EU Council presidency (June-December 2020). Exports to crisis regions and military cooperation with non-NATO members that disregard human rights and democracy undermine the international peace order.

5. Challenges from autonomisation, cyber space and nuclear weapons

Autonomisation and partial autonomisation of weapons

A new peace ethical challenge is posed by *autonomous, partially autonomous und unmanned weapons systems*, which are also used to avert danger and thereby to protect not only soldiers but also civilians. At the same time there are many different risks: a lowering of the threshold for military engagement, a deterritorialisation of war or the completely unsolved questions of control and responsibility for the consequences of a military action. With a rising degree of autonomisation the risks are increasing and, in the case of autonomous and partially autonomous systems, their deployment would also raise elementary questions of human dignity.

- We call for autonomous weapons operating without human control to be banned under international law and appeal to the federal government to advocate for a binding prohibition of autonomous weapons systems.
- We support the international “Stop Killer Robots” campaign to outlaw fully autonomous weapons.

Cyber space

Cyber attacks differ fundamentally from the traditional forms of warfare. They appear to take place in a 'bloodless' virtual space, but can have dramatic effects, particularly when they hit vital infrastructure such as power lines or water supplies. Many states, including Germany, react by setting up military cyber commands. The latter must be connected to rule-of-law procedures, monitored by public authorities and linked to non-military reconnaissance and hazard prevention facilities. This connection should be guaranteed and, indeed, tightened up. A crucial factor is resilience, i.e. establishing safe, robust infrastructures and taking the necessary precautions for restoring them. Establishing and reinforcing these infrastructures is primarily the responsibility of political decision-makers and industry.

- We declare ourselves in favour of strengthening mainly civil structures and civil defence measures against cyber attacks.
- In order to avoid or settle conflicts in cyber space, we see the need to develop and introduce a binding international instrument on cyber attacks based on ethical criteria. The federal government should press for this in the United Nations context.

Nuclear weapons

Nuclear weapons are weapons of mass destruction and a threat to the whole of human life on earth. Back in 2007 the EKD's peace memorandum underlined that the threat of using nuclear weapons "can today no longer be seen as a legitimate means of self-defence" (para 162). The political goal therefore remains Global Zero: a world without nuclear weapons. While there is a broad consensus on this goal, how to get there is a matter of dispute. Yet today, in view of a lack of disarmament and the way nuclear weapons are being modernised and proliferating, we cannot but conclude that only the outlawing of nuclear weapons under international law will build up the necessary pressure to eliminate them. The breach of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances at the expense of Ukraine is a massive setback in the effort to achieve further nuclear disarmament. The revoking of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty further increases the risk of nuclear arms build-up. The longer nuclear weapons are manufactured, modernised, upgraded and at the ready, the greater the risk of their being used, or of a disastrous accident. It has been demonstrated that the possession of nuclear weapons is no protection against attacks with conventional weapons. We cannot enjoy peace of mind in Germany either, since a nuclear threat also emanates from German soil, at the Büchel airbase [translator's note: the only German site where US nuclear weapons are still stored]. There are still approx. 16,000 nuclear warheads in the world and so far no disarmament has been possible under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. This shows that the prohibition of nuclear weapons negotiated in 2017 following a UN General Assembly resolution is long overdue.

We call upon the federal government to initiate practical steps towards signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). This presupposes talks and negotiations with its partners in NATO, the EU and the OSCE on the following topics:

- further developing the TPNW, particularly the review mechanisms,
- a worldwide moratorium on the modernisation of nuclear weapons,
- an initiative for negative security guarantees, i.e. the obligations of the nuclear states not to use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states,
- new efforts to achieve disarmament and arms control.

Trust is the basis of all peace policy and the key to nuclear disarmament.

The ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

We recall with gratitude the Ecumenical Assembly for Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation in April 1989 in Dresden. The EKD maintains links with churches worldwide. As we prepare for the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Karlsruhe in 2021 we are following its call to join an ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, including the ecumenical pilgrimage for climate justice. As part of God's peace moving into the world, we pledge – in our own structures and processes of change, in our daily action and in view of social and political challenges – to pray for God's peace, to constantly pursue it and to stand up for justice and peace. We are on the move, trusting that God will “guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79).

Dresden, 13 November 2019

The President of the Synod
of the Evangelical Church in Germany

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