



Church and Peace International Office

Church and Peace - the ecumenical peace church network, of communities, training centres, peace organisations and peace service agencies in Europe

Interfaith and nonviolent: "Believers for Peace" and "Church and Peace" oppose worrying growth of nationalism and xenophobia in Southeast Europe.

Schöffengrund, Germany, 27 April 2017 - "Re:Action - Believers for Peace in Times of Nationalism and Xenophobia" was the theme of a conference which was held at the beginning of April near Zagreb, Croatia, with more than 70 participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, and guests from Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, and the USA. Muslims and Christians, including imams, Serbian Orthodox priests, members of religious orders, and pastors of various denominations, took part. The conference was organised by the European network "Church and Peace" and RAND, a member organisation of Church and Peace in the region. Financial support was provided by: the Protestant Church in Baden; the Bremen-based foundation "die schwelle"; the German Catholic solidarity campaign with the people in Central and Eastern Europe, Renovabis; and the Ecumenical Women's Initiative in Omis.

The team of organisers was made up of Christians and Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, who have been working tirelessly since 2006 to reduce religious, ethnic, and political tensions - in keeping with their motto: "By building peace we glorify God". Since 2013 more than 200 people have signed the "Believers for Peace" declaration with the aim of strengthening the bonds between people's personal faith life, active involvement in the praxis of nonviolence, and methods of social action, thereby strengthening the peacemaking potential of the various faith traditions.

In lectures and discussion sessions on the social, political, and religious conditions and myths which give rise to nationalism and xenophobia, the participants agreed - as expressed in the [concluding declaration](#) of the conference - that "any justification of xenophobia and nationalism by faith arguments or religious traditions is profoundly wrong and unacceptable". The participants were strengthened by intensive sharing about the impressive diversity of peace work in their various countries and encounters between people from very different backgrounds who are nevertheless united by their faith in God and their commitment to peace.

Prof. Nerzuk Ćurak encouraged the participants to see their work for peace in a larger historical context: "The seeds which we sow in the soil today with our seemingly tiny contributions to peace will one day grow to be part of society's collective memory."

Following conferences in Krk, Croatia in 2006, Blagaj, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2008, and Andrevlje, Serbia in 2010, this was the fourth conference in the region, at which "Believers for Peace" aimed to empower people from the Abrahamic traditions in Southeast Europe/Western Balkans to build a more just and peaceful society through nonviolence.

"When we chose the conference theme, we had no idea it was going to be so topical. Unfortunately the situation is even more tense than it was last year," said Ana Raffai, who is a Catholic theologian from Croatia and one of the founders of "Believers for Peace".

She also observed that "The conference has been well reported in the press and media. One newspaper headline was 'There are Christian and Muslim believers who sign declarations against nationalism and xenophobia.' Another headline was 'Believers cannot be fascists.' That's the news here!"

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