

CEC PEACE CONFERENCE 2019
10-12 September 2019
Institut Protestant de Théologie– Paris, France

Concluding Remarks – by Catherine Tsavdaridou, Ecumenical Patrarchate

Thursday 12 September 2019, 12.45-13.00

1. Over the last three days we have been reappraising the past and reimagining the future. We have been doing this as members of European churches, deeply embedded in European history, and as an ecumenical movement of churches in Europe. Our re-imagining of the future has not only been a re-imagining of the churches future but the future of our European continent and the world. We are committed to promoting peace as servants of peace.
2. The 1919 Paris Peace Conference did not succeed in creating a just world order. Imperial power and self-interest dominated. There were nations excluded from the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and its outcomes, such as Russia, Germany, China and the USA as an act of self-exclusion from the League of Nations.
3. We do not build peace through exclusion but a peace process always requires everyone to be at the table. Actions were decided in Paris without any real consideration of consequences and many of the decisions were tragic and are still with us not at least in the Middle East.
4. Historically the Conference of European Churches calling has also been one of reconciliation and peacebuilding. It has ably demonstrated this during the time of the iron curtain. As was affirmed during this this Conference in recent times there is an increasing sense of insecurity and a loss of identity in different regions of Europe. The context is fragile and the Conference of European Churches is once again called to respond appropriately to the challenges to peace and security in Europe, demonstrating its common Christian voice.
5. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself...and has given us the ministry of reconciliation..." 2 Corinthians 5:19. In the vision of St Paul reconciliation and peacebuilding are a participation in God's mission in and for the world. Jesus declared the peacemakers the children of God, a Jewish way of describing the most God-like people. The churches, therefore, have a witness to and practice of peace. Churches are also part of civil society and therefore reconciliation and peace are not private and individualistic pursuits. The witness to and practice of peace is public and peace witness is public theology in action. As responsible actors in civil society, we the churches, do our theology and peacebuilding in the public arena. The setting up of a Peace Task Force, which the Conference of European Churches is preparing, is a response to God's action in Christ, the living out of public theology and being responsible actors in civil society.
6. We are facing a tough future with uncertainty, where there are negative social, cultural, political and religious dynamics, even within Europe peace is threatened and therefore the peace imperative and peace vocation is more urgent than ever. Today, the continent experiences pain from unhealed wounds and new divisions. We also recall our place in the broader world and the global challenges that we face. European churches have to look to their roots and history, and again act as an instrument of peace and understanding. To actively participate in God's mission in and for the world skilled peace mediators are required. The training of peace mediators will be one of the tasks of the CEC Peace Task Force. The ministry of reconciliation according to St. Paul is the task of all of God's

people. Yet within this there is need for practitioners equipped with the knowledge and skills for engaging, responding and mediating appropriately to particular situations of conflict and for being instruments of peace. Again, this will be a task of the CEC Peace Task Force.

7. Reappraising the past and learning from it opens up the imagination to be able to vision the future. On the way to what we have identified some contemporary challenges to peace: the rise of populism, the growth of new forms of nationalism, the democratic recession and the diminution of human rights. The growing gap between rich and poor, social and economic inequality, environmental degradation and the challenges of economic and ecological migrants that will be part of our reality and our experience for some time to come. And in all these the threat of violence and war. Some of it is being justified by appeal to religion.

8. All of this calls the churches again to an apostolic peace vocation. This would mean to identify the profile and educate for the deep resources for peace at the heart of our Christian faith and other neighbour religions also. Here we have a shared and collaborative vocation, one being interfaith alliances. The peace vocation of the churches is a public vocation. There is nothing privatised about justice and peacemaking and there is nothing privatised about actively loving the enemy and being committed to justice and peace for all. One hundred years ago the Treaty of Versailles had as its controlling metaphor the idea of Covenant. Whatever exactly Versailles meant by Covenant and however far short its efforts at recreating a peaceful world were the Christian community and indeed the Abrahamic communities are all deeply committed and draw inspiration from the Covenant of Peace.

9. In the Judeo-Christian and Muslim traditions Covenant is core, concrete metaphor. It refers to pledged relationships in social solidarity at the heart which are social justice, compassion and shalom, total human and environmental wellbeing. Our shared ecumenical commitment, as churches and as religions is a pledged practical commitment to nothing less. We go from Paris we a renewed vision and active commitment to peace.