

Diocese of Arundel and Brighton Justice and Peace Conference 2023

Saturday January 28th saw a return to a live, face-to-face Diocese of Arundel Annual Justice and Peace Conference. After several years of online meetings, this was the first meeting that took place in person at the St. Philip Howard Centre in Crawley, West Sussex. The event included the Bishop of Arundel and Brighton, Rt. Rev. Richard Moth with speakers from CAFOD, the Ecological Conversion Group and Pax Christi. Each speaker sought to add a perspective to form a bigger picture, so as to enable attendees to understand better the connection between conflict and food, with a view to making the world fairer and thus more peaceful.

Francis Stewart from CAFOD was the first speaker, who made mention of paragraph 139 of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*; the aforementioned paragraph is below:

When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

Mr. Stewart also quoted the Pope as saying that in a crisis, you are 'better or worse, never the same'. Furthermore, Pope Francis has suggested that “today, we are not living in an era of change but a change of era.”

Mr. Stewart encouraged discussion of Exodus 16 and how the commandments of God, reflected in the behaviour of the Hebrews, led to people collecting only the amount of food that was needed, nothing more. Fields and vineyards were not to be stripped bare, but gleanings of the harvest remnants were to be left for the widow, the stranger and the orphan.

The speaker from CAFOD then discussed the nature of food systems with mention made of producers and consumers. Environmental drivers such as climate, soil conditions as well as socio-economic factors are significant. The cost of some crops such as barley and sunflower oil has spiked since the invasion of Ukraine. The increased use of fertilisers has also seen the costs passed onto consumers.

With increased food prices, there is now approximately one third of the global population that does not receive adequate food on a daily basis, with 800 million experiencing hunger despite the fact that there is indeed enough food for all. Ironically, two thirds of people facing hunger are agricultural workers.

Olivier de Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, has explained that food is not produced sustainably. Preference is given to the growing of cash crops with little or no care for the soil. Such practices exacerbate and prolong agricultural damage with a handful of companies and

institutions being highly visible by their lack of accountability, emboldened as they are by global laws that enshrine the rights of companies in law and restrict the ability of governments to protect farmers.

The discussion then focussed on 'Agroecology' principles and their implementation, which are as follows: recycling; reducing; biodiversity; co-creation of knowledge; economic diversification; fairness; health; connectivity; participation; land and natural resource governance; social values; synergy (managing interactions); animal health. Bangladesh now sees more people using vermicompost (made by earthworms) and herbal pesticides to help the environment whilst Bolivia uses Agrobiodiversity Fairs to allow people to swap and share indigenous seeds. It was noted that without seed sovereignty, there cannot be food sovereignty.

Campaigners are calling upon the UK government to uphold the commitments of COP26 and COP27, as well as the commitments made at the COP15 Convention of Biological Diversity. In addition, the UK government is being urged to promote agroecology whilst reducing subsidies to fossil fuel companies. CAFOD is also working with Fairtrade to encourage farmers to work together and join fairer food systems rather than working for big companies.

John Paul de Quay spoke on behalf of the Ecological Conversion Group, highlighting both the challenges and potential solutions to be considered on this country's path to sustainability. Greater collaboration between stakeholders is needed to work towards a fairer and more peaceful society.

The day concluded with a speaker from Pax Christi talking about the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International, with attention being drawn to its website below: www.nonviolencejustpeace.net

To conclude, special mention must be made to the annual Fairtrade stall which is a perennial feature of the diocesan Justice and Peace Conferences. One of the members of the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton Fairtrade Steering Committee was there organising the stall, helping to promote the principles of Fairtrade whilst raising much needed funds for Fairtrade producers and artisans around the world.