



Declaration

Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions

“Which Are the Frontiers of Solidarity in Europe?”

We, of the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions of the Catholic Church, representing 25 European countries, accepted an invitation from the Spanish Justice and Peace Commission, and H.E. Cardinal Carlos Amigo Vallejo of Seville, to come to Seville from 18th to 22nd September 2009, to hold our General Assembly and an International Workshop on the theme: “Where are the frontiers for solidarity in Europe?”

The theme of solidarity takes on particular significance in the context of our increasingly globalized world. Unsurprisingly, globalization and the issues arising from this phenomenon featured prominently in Pope Benedict XVI’s latest Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, in which he pointed out that: “As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers” (No. 19).

In Seville we have had the opportunity to examine the challenges to solidarity – political, social, cultural and economic – on both a national and international level. The experience we have shared here have given us a renewed sense of our responsibilities – as individuals, as Europeans, and as a Church – to take action to address the challenges and take down the barriers blocking solidarity.

Pope John Paul II told us that “human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question” (*Laborem Exercens*, 3). *Caritas in Veritate* also states that this work should be “decent” (No. 63). The experience of this workshop has confirmed us in this view. A meeting with the staff of *Forja 21*, an NGO that

provides support for young people seeking employment, highlighted the importance of addressing the problem of youth unemployment – a serious concern in many European countries at the present time. We need to invest in the young people, who are our future, facilitating their access to employment, which will enable them to participate in our society and reach their full potential. The significance of unemployment as a barrier to participation needs to be recognised.

A visit to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta on the Moroccan coast allowed us to learn more about the human dimension of the challenges arising from migration – a phenomenon closely linked to globalization and also intimately connected to the problem of unemployment. The 600 migrants currently stranded in Ceuta as they await a legal resolution of their residency status, a process that can take up to three years – if they have not been deported before this – are, for the most part, young people willing and eager to work, and yet they are prevented from doing so. Forced to flee their homes as a result of violence and/or unemployment and/or extreme poverty, they have undertaken a long and perilous journey to get to Europe in search of work and a better life. Instead, they find themselves confined at the margins of European society, with their freedoms severely limited, unable to participate, contribute, or make choices about their future. In fact, some of these young people told us simply: ‘We have no future’. Solidarity demands that we do all we can to give these people something to aim for.

The huge double-fences, topped with barbed wire, that divide the city of Ceuta from the rest of the African continent, are a powerful visual representation of a fear that seeks to keep those in need as far from our doors as possible. We all felt a shared sense of responsibility for this wall – part-financed by the European Union. We have taken down the Berlin wall twenty year ago and we have erected other walls elsewhere.

On the shore of Algeciras the representatives of the Justice and Peace commissions, together with the representatives of the local church and wider community, shared a moment of prayer for all the people who had lost their lives in their quest to come to Europe.

Social exclusion, fear and insecurity were evident also in our visit to the *Polígono Sur* neighbourhood, which served to highlight the links between poverty and violence. Faced with the problem of violence in our society, it is tempting to retreat behind thicker walls, higher fences and closed neighbourhoods. As a long-term

solution, however, this will not work. What is needed is an active response, founded on solidarity that addresses the root causes of this violence – unemployment, poverty, social exclusion. The visit ended on a note of hope as we saw signs that such measures are already beginning to take shape in the form of the ‘participative social action plan’ currently being implemented in the neighbourhood with the active participation by the residents.

A visit to *Sevilla Acoge*, the first organisation established in Spain to provide support to migrants and promote their integration into the local community, showed a powerful example of people who saw a need and are doing all they can to meet it. This is achieved through networking and committed social work input. The work of this organisation serves to remind us that true solidarity demands respect for cultural diversity in a spirit of hospitality.

The problems we examined in the International Workshop are manifold and complex, requiring solutions in both the short-term for those in our society who are experiencing poverty, unemployment and exclusion at the moment, and long-term aimed at addressing the structural causes. This includes recognition that we cannot distance ourselves from the political, social and economic problems of the African countries. Through this experience we were also able to broaden our understanding of effective and real solidarity, including its ethical and spiritual dimensions and the need for personal commitment on the part of all those involved. Hence, solidarity will enable us to reshape barriers into meeting places where we can meet as brothers and sisters.

We wish to conclude by thanking the Spanish Commission for Justice and Peace, H.E. Cardinal Amigo of Seville, Bishop Antonio Ceballo of Cadiz y Ceuta, and all those who welcomed us during this international workshop, which has reaffirmed us in our Christian responsibility to care for the most vulnerable, on local, national and international level, because for the Church no one is a stranger.

Seville (Spain) September the 22nd 2009