



## The Human Person as the 'Imago Dei'

### *Statement on International Human Rights Day 2024*

On this International Human Rights Day, Justice and Peace Europe reaffirms its commitment to a vision of human rights grounded in the principle of *Imago Dei*- the belief that each human being is created in the image of God. This conviction lies at the heart of our efforts for human dignity, justice, and peace. That each individual's intrinsic worth transcends cultural, religious, and national boundaries is a principle that unites us. The principle of *Imago Dei* calls for an uncompromising commitment to human rights, rooted in an understanding that each person, by virtue of their divine likeness, deserves respect and protection. As we strive for a fairer, more compassionate society, we are reminded that our efforts are more than political; they are moral imperatives, grounded in the profound spiritual understanding that each of us is called to reflect God's love and respect for humanity through our actions.

Pope Francis' new encyclical on the Sacred Heart, *Dilexit Nos*, emphasizes the relationship between the Imago Dei and the love God has for all his children. *Dilexit Nos* reiterates that "the love of God bestows on humanity an inalienable dignity" and that, through our acts of mercy and justice, we manifest this love in ways that protect the weakest among us. In a world beset by injustices and inequalities, *Dilexit Nos* reminds us that human rights are not merely legal entitlements or privileges granted by governments or society, but sacred commitments reflecting our shared heritage as children of God.

#### Addressing the Current Human Rights Landscape in Europe

Across Europe and globally, there is a rise in circumstances that threaten human dignity: forced displacement, increasing social and economic inequalities, the climate crisis, wars and the erosion of democratic values. Fear of migration is growing in Europe. The European Union continues to reinforce its external borders with the effect that in some cases, caring for migrants and refugees is outsourced to other countries with little respect for the intrinsic dignity of each human person. Justice and Peace

Europe stands with Pope Francis in calling for a human-centered response to these pressing issues, one founded on human rights and respect for *Imago Dei*. This must be reflected in policies, practices, and purpose, looking first to the humanity of others, and addressing crises with empathy and a steadfast commitment to justice. The *Imago Dei* calls us to a prophetic mission, demanding that we look beyond politics and prejudice, and inspiring us to fight against structures that sustain injustice.

In its basic treaty the European Union affirms the respect for human dignity as the first of the European values. The other values are freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Therefore, it has a unique role to play in building a continent that respects and protects the rights of all its inhabitants, and also radiates justice and peace to its neighbourhood and to the world. We call upon Members of the European Parliament and the newly appointed European Commission to prioritise human rights-based legislation that strengthens protections for marginalised communities and promotes integral human development – the development of every person and the whole person- both within the Union and in its relations with other countries.

On this International Human Rights Day, let us renew our commitment to a vision of human rights based on *Imago Dei*. We reaffirm that true peace is the fruit of justice, and true justice is founded on the recognition of every person's divine image and inherent worth.

May our dedication to the *Imago Dei* and the Sacred Heart serve as a lasting testament to the transcendent human dignity and rights of all. We call for a Europe where human rights are respected, where the divine image in each individual is cherished, and where justice and peace are not remote ideals but lived realities.

10 December 2024

The Executive Committee of Justice and Peace Europe