

A Catholic pledge for the Sustainable Development Goals

Statement of the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions on the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals at the UN General Assembly in New York, 25 September 2015

1. The 25th of September 2015 was a special and memorable day. On this same day Pope Francis gave an inspiring speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations that adopted a new set of development goals. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 specific targets replace the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000 that helped to free an estimate of nearly one billion people from extreme poverty and to achieve significant progress in other areas, such as considerably reducing child mortality in many countries. We, the participants of the General Assembly of the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions in Europe (*Justice and Peace Europe*) sincerely hope that these new SDGs - together with a new comprehensive climate change agreement to be adopted in Paris later this year – make an even stronger impact in the coming decade. We are grateful to the Pope who called the adoption of the SDGs “*an important sign of hope*”¹.

2. We consider the presence and the speech of Pope Francis in New York to be a Catholic pledge to contribute to the aim of a “*world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive, ... free of fear and violence, of universal respect for human rights and human dignity*”² by 2030. *Justice and Peace Europe* strongly supports this pledge. It will encourage its European member organisations and institutions to contribute as much as possible to implementing the SDGs which are universal and apply to all countries, rich and poor alike, intending to help particularly poor countries in need of special support. *Justice and Peace Europe* will also promote the concept of sustainable development in its three dimensions (economic, social and environmental) as a possible structural paradigm for our work.

3. It has been a long journey for the world community to agree on a new set of development goals. The Open Working Group of the General Assembly was instrumental in developing this new framework. International negotiations took place to discuss the preamble, the declaration, the final definition of goals and targets, means of implementation and finance before an agreement on the final draft was reached on 2 August last. *Justice and Peace Europe* acknowledges this as a major step forward and is pleased for what has been achieved.

4. Goal 1 to “*to end poverty in all its forms everywhere*” and goal 2 “*to end hunger*” open the list of SDGs. *Justice and Peace Europe* salutes this decision. Furthermore, it wishes to express its specific support for goal 10 “*to reduce inequality within and among countries*”, for target 5.c “*to adopt and strengthen sound policies for the promotion of the empowerment of women*” and for target 16.2 “*to end abuse,*

¹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html.

² Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, Declaration, N° 7.

exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children” in full respect of the “*dignity of the human person*”³. We also fully support targets 16.5 and 16.6 which aim at “*substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms*” and at “*developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels*” and are in line with a vision of a “*world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity*”⁴. Progress towards good governance and respect for democracy and the rule of law are highly important for achieving the SDGs.

5. Nevertheless, with the following remarks without being an exhaustive review of all 17 goals and 169 targets, we would like to point out that some criticism is also to be put in place. Some of these many targets are confusing and do not distinguish sufficiently between ends and means. The large number of goals and targets also sometimes leads to a lack of priorities. Thus, it has been written that the current digital transformation of the world economy is not sufficiently reflected.⁵ Furthermore, some goals do not appear feasible which underlines the aspirational character of the global SDGs whose actual translation into action is left to member states⁶. As *Justice and Peace Europe*, we would like to emphasise, as Pope Francis stated at the UN General Assembly on the 25th of September, that our development focus and the “*pillars of integral human development have a common foundation, which is the right to life and, more generally, what we could call the right to existence of human nature itself*”⁷.

6. The most critical issue for reaching the SDGs within the 2030 deadline is finance. According to a prediction of the World Bank and in line with the Third UN Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa last July, shift of paradigm from “billions to trillions” in development aid will be needed to reach the SDGs within the next fifteen years. The major part of this sum should come from private sources. However, we consider this proportion highly implausible. Public finance, domestic or international, will have to play a more important role. With regard to domestic public finance, effective tax collection and transparent tax systems are a major prerequisite to “*reduce illicit financial flows*”⁸. With regard to international development cooperation, which mostly means public aid for development, the EU needs to assume its self-proclaimed political leadership. However, in 2015 collective EU development aid will likely only increase to 0.44% compared to 0.42% or roughly 60 billion euros in 2014. In May 2015, EU countries renewed their pledge to devote 0.7% of their Gross National Income to development aid and to commit 0.15% to 0.2% to the poorest countries. However, the previous deadline to achieve this goal this year has been quietly abandoned. Instead the EU Council of Ministers set 2030 as a new deadline by promising to achieve the financial targets “*within the framework of post-2015*”

³ Declaration, n° 4.

⁴ Declaration, , n° 8.

⁵ Cf. OECD, Digital Economy Outlook 2015, p.73.

⁶ Declaration, n° 21.

⁷ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html .

⁸ Cf. Third International Conference on Financing for Development, The Addis Ababa Action Agenda, n° 22 – 23.

agenda".⁹ In the next years *Justice and Peace Europe* will advocate an acceleration of this new timetable and support the same with regard to other European donor countries, like Norway and Switzerland.

7. Finally, implementing the SDGs will be complex and complicated. At the national level we hope that participatory approaches will be established.¹⁰ At the international level the UN needs sufficient funding from its member states, especially for appropriate monitoring and science-based evaluation mechanisms. But the UN itself will also have to reorganise its fragmented development cooperation work in line with the SDGs. This is clearly a major challenge for the new UN Secretary General when he or she will take office in 2017.

Whether the world community will succeed in achieving the SDGs by 2030 will also depend on sustained efforts to communicate their contents and conception and active engagement of religious and civil society groups. At the moment there is still a rift between highly aware diplomats, NGO activists and academia on the one side, and the less informed average citizen on the other. According to the pledge made above, *Justice and Peace Europe* will do the best it can to help in bridging this rift.

Copenhagen, 27 September 2015

The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (Justice and Peace Europe) is the alliance of 31 Justice and Peace Commissions in Europe, working for the promotion of justice, peace and respect for human dignity. Justice and Peace Europe contributes to raising awareness of the Catholic social doctrine in the European societies and the European institutions. Its General Secretariat is based in Brussels.

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⁹ EU Council Conclusions: A New Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015, n° 34.

¹⁰ Cf. <http://www.cafod.org.uk/Policy-and-Research/Post-2015>.