

28-2-5

# Pax Christi International

Plantin en Moretuslei 174  
B-2018 Antwerpen, Belgium/Belgique

International Secretariat

Secrétariat International

Tel. (03) 235 36 40

28 September 1990

**UN Representative**  
777 UN Plaza # 4A-2  
New York, N.Y. 10017  
U.S.A.  
Tel.: (212) 687-5340

Your Excellency,

With gratitude that you have accepted the invitation to participate in the World Summit for Children, we are pleased to forward to you the Statement of Pax Christi International Catholic Peace Movement for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

*S. Mary Beth Reissen*

Sister Mary Beth Reissen  
UN Representative  
Pax Christi International

*Eileen Egan*

Eileen Egan  
Alternate UN Representative  
Pax Christi International

Enclosure

International Catholic Peace Movement: National Sections - International Commissions / Human Rights - Disarmament and Security - East-West - North-South - Youth Work - Peace Education - Peace Spirituality - Nonviolence / Consultative Status at United Nations and Council of Europe / UNESCO Peace Education Prize 1983 /

International Secretary: E. De Jonghe.

Mouvement international catholique pour la paix: sections nationales - commissions internationales / Droits de l'homme - Désarmement et Sécurité - Est-Ouest - Nord-Sud - Activités de jeunesse - Education à la paix - Spiritualité de la paix - Nonviolence / Statut consultatif auprès de l'ONU et le Conseil de l'Europe / Prix UNESCO de l'Education à la Paix 1983 /

national: E. De Jonghe.

# Pax Christi International

Plantin en Moretuslei 174  
B-2018 Antwerpen, Belgium/Belgique

International Secretariat

Secrétariat International

Tel. (03) 235 36 40

**UN Representative**  
777 UN Plaza # 4A-2  
New York, N.Y. 10017  
U.S.A.  
Tel.: (212) 687-5340

STATEMENT OF PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC PEACE MOVEMENT

TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR CHILDREN AT UN HEADQUARTERS, 29-30 SEPTEMBER

Pax Christi International Catholic Peace Movement congratulates the world leaders participating in this Summit for Children and extends prayerful support for their deliberations.

Pax Christi, founded in France in the aftermath of World War II, is an organization of Roman Catholics with an avowed purpose to work for peace for all humankind, always witnessing to the peace of Christ. Pax Christi's membership numbers some 100,000 persons, with 19 national sections and headquarters in Antwerp, Belgium.

At the heart of Pax Christi's work for peace is the recognition of human dignity, the dignity of each person as image and child of God. This is the *raison d'être* for Pax Christi's efforts in the promotion of peace and human rights.

Together with the President of the NGO Committee on UNICEF we call on the world leaders to include in the Summit's Declaration and Programme of Action specific strategies and programmes for the protection of the rights of children found in difficult circumstances as specified in UN Document E/ICEF/1990/NGO/8. Here we emphasize the problems of children in armed conflicts and of children who are refugees, migrants or internally displaced. We urge the world leaders to recommit their countries to respect for international humanitarian laws for the protection of children in these difficult circumstances.

International Catholic Peace Movement: National Sections - International Commissions / Human Rights - Disarmament and Security - East-West - North-South - Youth Work - Peace Education - Peace Spirituality - Nonviolence / Consultative Status at United Nations and Council of Europe / UNESCO Peace Education Prize 1983 /

International Secretary: E. De Jonghe.

Mouvement international catholique pour la paix: sections nationales - commissions internationales / Droits de l'homme - Désarmement et Sécurité - Est-Ouest - Nord-Sud - Activités de jeunesse - Education à la paix - Spiritualité de la paix - Nonviolence / Statut consultatif auprès de l'ONU et le Conseil de l'Europe / Prix UNESCO de l'Education à la Paix 1983 /  
- Secrétaire International: E. De Jonghe.

We cannot ignore the fact that governments and insurgent forces continue to exploit children as soldiers. We deeply regret that Article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, now in force, condones the conscripting of children, age 15 and over, into armed conflicts. Such a provision can be viewed as contradicting the Convention's overall objective which defines a child as a person under the age of 18.

In the Convention's preparatory process Pax Christi made a strong representation to governments on the matter of military conscription. In one country Pax Christi held a national day of prayer so that UN delegates would be moved to recognize the age of 18 as the age of military conscription. However, Pax Christi reiterated in the appended Statement of August 29, 1990 to the UN Human Rights Commission Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities unwavering opposition to military conscription and support in the United Nations for conscientious objection to military service as a human right.

We trust that all governments will commit themselves to take seriously the Joint NGO assertion: "Children are victims of war when war causes famine, when it destroys their schools, health clinics and other essential institutions, when it breaks families apart, or destroys their homes." What is described in this melancholy list is the effect of indiscriminate warfare. It is the tragic commentary of our time that modern warfare, whether in international or internal armed conflicts, makes no distinctions between combatants and non-combatants. It is for this reason that modern warfare is termed indiscriminate.

Need we recall Article 54, paragraph 1 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts which states: "Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited."

A telling response to the use of starvation as a weapon of warfare is given in the legal commentary, The Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions for the Protection of Victims of International Conflicts and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea: Repercussions on the Law of Naval Warfare (International Law Institute, University of Kiel, Berlin, 1984):

Art. 54 par. 1 of Protocol I unambiguously provides that starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited. As a matter of consequence, naval blockades of the kind enforced by the Entente Powers and the Allied Powers in World Wars I and II. . . would be in violation of Protocol I. Any blockade of the ports and coasts of an enemy, whose civilian population is not adequately provided with food would be a breach of the law of armed conflict.

We further observe that such blockades are a direct attack on the welfare of civilians, in particular children, who experience lifetime suffering from even short periods of food deprivation and starvation.

An effect of indiscriminate warfare is to drive millions of people from their homes. The world knows approximately 15 million persons who are refugees at this time, among them more than half women and children. What can we expect of these children living their formative years in instability, lacking regular schooling and family life and, in some cases, knowing that their parents and they might be subject to forceable repatriation to a place to which they fear to return?

Finally we draw the attention of the world leaders participating in the Summit for Children to the condemnation of indiscriminate warfare issued by the Roman Catholic Bishops of the entire world at the Second Vatican Council in Rome in 1965:

Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or extensive areas along with their populations is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation.

In the realization that any conflict, however localized, might soon take on the nature of being indiscriminate, many members of Pax Christi are reluctant to take part in the destruction and killing of warfare. Those of military age are asking in greater numbers for the right of alternative civilian service in which service they would be able to come to the aid of those in need, especially children, by performing the works of mercy instead of the works of war.

(End of Statement. Appended Item follows.)

STATEMENT BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS SUB-COMMISSION ON PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES, 42ND SESSION, AGENDA ITEM 17(a) HUMAN RIGHTS AND YOUTH, 29 AUGUST 1990

Pax Christi International was gratified when the UN Human Rights Commission, at its 43rd Session in 1987, voted in favor of recognizing conscientious objection to military service as a human right in consonance with Article 3 and 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The reaffirmation of this resolution at the Commission's 45th Session in 1989 was welcomed.

It is regrettable in the extreme that this human right cannot be exercised by young people who are conscripted for combatant service in many armies and guerilla forces.

Pax Christi International was among the NGOs opposing Article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which can be seen as contradicting the overall objective of that Convention in that it allows children of 15 years to be subject to participation in combat duty in armed conflict.

The protection of children would call for a study by the UN Secretary General on the recruitment of children into the armed forces of governments and guerilla units. Granted that the collection of data on this subject may be difficult, the effect would still be worthwhile; the help of the specialized agencies of the UN including UNICEF would be important in gathering factual material. Pax Christi International stands ready to give all possible assistance in the gathering of pertinent material so important to a very vulnerable part of the human community.

We wish to place before the Sub-Commission the statement of Pax Christi-USA President, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, who has recently returned from a visit to Central America:

Life, for most people in Central America is a constant struggle for survival. Institutionalized violence and extreme poverty plague the populations in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and other countries. For children, the combination of routine repression, war, and the lack of basic human resources is especially disturbing and places them at great risk.

Besides having to overcome the deadly problems of war and poverty, teenage boys in Central America must deal with the ugly possibility of forced recruitment into the armed forces. This inhuman policy not only jeopardizes young lives but also denies these youth the possibility of normal development and to become, someday, healthy adults and productive members of society.

The time has come when all women and men of good conscience must denounce forced recruitment of young people in Central America and elsewhere and lay the foundation for a better future—a future where children can be children, and where youth can live and grow in peace.

This statement of Pax Christi International stands in relation with Mr. Mazilu's updated report (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1990/45) which at this stage, however, is silent about the specific question of forced recruiting of children in armed forces and guerilla activities.

70