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CATHOLIC LEADERS CONVENE IN ROME ON PEACEBUILDING IN ANTICIPATION OF *PACEM IN TERRIS* ANNIVERSARY

Catholic leaders from some of the world's worst conflict zones gathered at the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in Rome on May 29th and 30th to discuss ways to make peace. Nigeria, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Somalia, Peru, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were among the 22 countries represented in a seminar, "**New Challenges for Catholic Peacebuilding.**"

"From South Sudan, the Middle East and Central America to Congo, Colombia and the Philippines, the Catholic Church is a powerful force for peace, freedom, justice and reconciliation," said **Cardinal Peter Turkson**, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who led the meeting. "But this impressive and courageous peacebuilding often remains unknown, under-analyzed and unappreciated."

Anticipating the 50th anniversary of Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in terris*, the seminar analyzed the "best practices" of contemporary Catholic peacebuilding, and considered how the encyclical can inform the further development of the Catholic theology, ethics, practice and spirituality of peacebuilding.

Michel Roy, Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, identified ten "best practices" of peacebuilding and development, which grow out of Caritas' mission of "accompaniment." These include training bishops and other Church officials in the art and skill of peacebuilding; supporting elections and democratization; rehabilitating and healing victims; integrating peacebuilding in humanitarian work; and contributing to development of cultures of peace and human rights.

The seminar was sponsored by the *Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*, and co-sponsored by the *Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN)* and *Caritas Internationalis*, in collaboration with the University of Notre Dame's *Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies*, *Catholic Relief Services*, Catholic Theological Union's *Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry*, The Catholic University of America's *Institute for Policy Research*, the *Institut für Theologie und Frieden* in Germany, *Pax Christi International*, and the University of San Diego's *Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies*.

Gerard Powers, professor of the practice at Notre Dame's Kroc Institute and Coordinator of the CPN, noted that "bringing together 45 of the Church's most creative, committed and effective peacebuilders from a broad cross section of the Church exemplifies the wide variety of charisms needed to address the complexities of today's conflicts in a way that reflects the Church's distinctive mission."

Among the themes that emerged in the seminar discussions were the following:

- The Church is not satisfied with a negative peace, defined as a cessation of violence, but goes further and seeks to build a positive peace rooted in the dignity of the human person and a commitment to the common good.

- In addition to civil wars and inter-state conflicts, the Church is addressing new kinds of conflicts involving drug wars and general lawlessness; violent competition for scarce resources; and the instability, injustices, and environmental degradation often associated with extractive industries.
- Church leaders at the local and national level often risk their lives speaking out against repressive policies, defending the rights of minorities, engaging violent actors in efforts to advance peace processes, and mediating between governments and insurgents.
- As the Church engages perpetrators of violence and seeks to hold them accountable for abuses, more attention is being paid to the need to also accompany victims of conflict by insisting on their right to restitution of land and property, and their need for healing and help in rebuilding their lives.
- The victimization of women, in particular, needs special attention, even as women themselves provide powerful, but often unrecognized, leadership in peacebuilding.
- Where Catholicism is a tiny minority, especially in Asia, the Church often is a spark – a catalyst – of inter-religious collaboration and social witness.
- The Church's peacebuilding is most effective when it is coordinated and integrated across and within sectors; while the Church lets a thousand flowers bloom, she must also make them into a bouquet.
- The Church's considerable and diverse experience in peacebuilding provides valuable insights that can inform the further development of a theology and ethics of peacebuilding.
- While peacebuilding principles and practices are often considered a subset of Catholic social teaching and action, understanding peacebuilding as our Christian vocation gives it greater coherence and greater theological and spiritual depth.
- Peacebuilding often involves a profound challenge of relating international human rights norms, which are often understood in highly individualistic ways, to cultural contexts with a more communitarian vision in which communal rights take precedence over individual rights.

- The Church's rich understanding of the requirements for reconciliation on the part of individuals, as well as communities, offers a helpful corrective to the more limited understanding of reconciliation that is promoted by governments and international institutions.

Texts from the seminar, the program, and list of participants can be found at: www.cpn.nd.edu.

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The Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN) is a voluntary network of practitioners, academics, clergy and laity from around the world which seeks to enhance the study and practice of Catholic peacebuilding, especially at the local level. The CPN aims to deepen bonds of solidarity among Catholic peacebuilders, share and analyze "best practices," expand the peacebuilding capacity of the Church in areas of conflict, and encourage the further development of a theology of a just peace. While it is a Catholic network, the CPN believes that authentic and effective Catholic peacebuilding involves dialogue and collaboration with those of other religious traditions and all those committed to building a more just and peaceful world.

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