

## ***Peace and reconciliation policy paper of Felm***

**The mission of the church in relation to building peace and reconciliation is to get people to see the image of God in every member of humanity. The basis of our peace work is the church's message on reconciliation, peace and justice. We apply a human rights based approach in our peace work.**

**Our peace work is realised through and in collaboration with our church partners and other partner organisations. Through our holistic mission work we strive to strengthen local actors to enable them to prevent conflicts and promote peace and reconciliation in their communities.**

**One strength of our peace work is that it reaches vulnerable and marginalised groups who are often otherwise excluded from peace processes. Our other strengths include the support we can provide for national and unofficial dialogue processes, and our expertise on the significance of religious beliefs in societies outside the rich western countries.**

## **1. Introduction**

### **Objectives**

During the strategy period 2017-2022 four key goals will feature prominently, as specified in our thematic Roadmap of Hope: 1) We will bear witness to God's universal love; 2) We will defend the human dignity and rights of marginalised people; 3) We will strive for a more just world; and 4) We will build peace and reconciliation.

Felm's Theological Charter defines the theological foundations for all our work. Policy papers have been defined for three focus areas within our thematic Roadmap of Hope: human rights, economic justice, and peace and reconciliation. These policy papers should be applied in unison, since human rights infringements, economic injustice and conflicts often go hand in hand. The papers also reflect the key values defined in our strategy: neighbourly love, justice, partnership and responsibility.

This policy paper presents Felm's position and approach regarding how peace and reconciliation should be realised as part of our holistic mission work. It also defines the basis for our peace and reconciliation work. Related analyses of our operating environment and current problems describe the issues we are working on with our partners, and map out future challenges.

Our policy papers steer all of our activities, while also informing our various stakeholders about our approach and our positions on the key issues addressed in our work. They have been designed for application between our wider strategy and our specific programmes. Procedures covering issues related to the environment and climate change have also been defined in connection with the policy papers. Our earlier policy papers related to HIV/AIDS and food security remain in effect, and will continue to support our strategic Roadmap of Hope.

## **2. Operating environment**

## Challenges and opportunities

Many of our partners live and work amid conflicts, and they suffer where the rights of individuals and communities are consequently not realised. In our work we often see conflicts arising as ethnic, religious or regional tensions linked to violence or the significant threat of violence. Armed conflicts prevent and even reverse socioeconomic development, while often resulting in poverty and inhibiting the realisation of the human rights of impoverished people. Wars particularly afflict the world's poorest countries and their poorest inhabitants.

The nature of armed conflicts has changed, and today they increasingly occur within countries rather than between countries. The total number of conflicts has declined, but they have widely become more complex, involving several parties who may be difficult to identify. Most of their victims are civilians, rather than soldiers. Violence against women is common during times of both war and peace, and it is also used as a weapon in conflicts. Minorities and people from other easily marginalised groups suffer disproportionately from the impacts of conflicts, the misuse of power and human rights infringements. These groups are often compelled to leave their homes and become forced migrants or refugees.

The direct causes of violence may include social unrest, demonstrations or elections. Factors in the background may include social and structural injustice and inequality. Ethnic groups are marginalised, human rights are abused, and disputes arise in relation to the utilisation and allocation of natural resources such as water, land and minerals.

Many internal conflicts within countries concern natural resources. As the global population grows and the impacts of climate change become more pronounced, conflicts concerning land and water will particularly intensify radically. Natural resources do not only cause internal conflicts, however, since they often involve external states who may be seeking to safeguard their access to vital natural resources. International and multinational companies are increasingly exploiting the natural resources found in conflict zones.

The environment also often becomes a victim of conflicts where natural resources and ecosystems are depleted or destroyed. This can lead to serious impacts on people's health and livelihoods. Environmental issues are not yet considered sufficiently during peace negotiations, even though they can significantly affect the prospects for the preservation of peace, since a safe and healthy environment is important for the development of entire economies as well as local livelihoods.

Conflicts related to land ownership are one of the greatest causes of political instability in the world today. Marginalised groups often do not have sufficient land rights, which in turn reduces their economic and political power. The lack of any wider consensus on land rights can create tensions between different tribes, ethnic groups and social classes, as well as the followers of different faiths.

Fragile states, the actions of extremist movements and terrorism all constitute significant threats. In the future the influence of non-state groups such as Boko Haram, ISIS and al-Shabaab will continue to spread over national borders, with increasing numbers of civilians consequently facing violence, persecution and discrimination. Violence and threats based on people's religious beliefs have become more common. This has led to significant increases in the violence committed by governments and religious groups, as well as the marginalisation of other religious groups. Extreme groups such as ISIS use religious rhetoric and the selective interpretation of religious beliefs to justify their goals and means. Religion becomes so intertwined with political and social goals that it is hard to estimate the genuine significance of religion as the root cause of conflicts. The importance of the media in conflicts has grown, and extremist movements and other parties to conflicts often exploit this to their advantage.

Religious intolerance has negative impacts in societies. There are strong links between armed conflicts and limitations on the freedom of religion. Insufficient freedom of religion increases the

tensions between groups who follow different faiths. Discrimination on the basis of faith practiced by states can make extremist movements more attractive, and reduce the scope for moderate groups to participate in public debate. Discrimination by states also encourages non-state organisations to resort to the use of violence. When states fulfil their responsibilities and actively uphold freedom of religion, the risk of conflict declines.

Due to ongoing conflicts there are more refugees around the world today than ever before. Their numbers will continue to rise in future, with impacts also visible in Finland. Women, children, persons with disabilities, and members of ethnic and religious minorities particularly tend to suffer from the consequences of violence and conflicts.

## **Key actors and processes**

The United Nations' Founding Charter assigns the main responsibility for preserving peace and security around the world to the UN Security Council. Over the last 20 years the UN's peace work has diversified. The UN Peacebuilding Commission, a Mediation Support Unit and various political operations have been set up to complement the UN's more conventional peacekeeping work. But the UN has nevertheless increasingly been powerless to act whenever the permanent members of the Security Council fail to agree unanimously on conflict interventions, since any of them use their right of veto to prevent action.

At the same time regional organisations such as the African Union and other regional alliances in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas have taken on a more prominent role in conflict resolution, peace work, peacekeeping and security. Many national governments, including those of Norway, Switzerland, Finland, Turkey and Qatar, have meanwhile invested in peacebuilding and mediation work, aiming to make an international contribution to peace.

In recent times the role and acceptability of faith-based organisations in conflict resolution and peace work has increased. The World Council of Churches, for instance, has long track record in peace work. The council has recently launched a "Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace" programme in collaboration with its member churches, and also set up an ecumenical network to promote advocacy work targeting sustainable peace. Building on a Finn Church Aid initiative, a network of conventional and religious leaders working for peace has also been established through collaboration with the UN and other actors.

The role of civil society organisations (CSOs) has grown significantly over the past decade, especially in peace mediation and peacebuilding work. The importance and appreciation of religious actors' role in peace work have also grown in recent years. Such organisations are able to act in situations where the involvement of external state actors may not be welcome.

Fragile states and their ability to cope with crises are currently a key focus area in many international and multilateral discussions related to ongoing conflicts. An international commitment made in 2011 to a *New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States* defines principles and policies designed to help fragile states build peace.

The interrelationship between peace and development is also reflected in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, approved in September 2015, where Goal 16 calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. It is additionally hoped that the status of women in conflicts and conflict resolution can be enhanced by implementing the recommendations set out in the UN Security Council's Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

## **3. Film and peace and reconciliation**

## **The theological basis for our peace and reconciliation work**

Our Christian identity and values form the most important basis for our peace and reconciliation work. The mission of the church calls for peace and reconciliation with all of God's creatures. Peace involves the acceptance of creation and the recognition of connections between all life and the Creator. Peace is more than the absence of war, since it must also involve justice, shared wellbeing, functioning social interactions, security and hope. Peace unites and connects different kinds of people and groups of people.

The church also strives to function during times of war, violence and conflict. Peace work and praying for peace are unceasing elements of the church's work. In building peace and reconciliation the church's role is to get people to see the image of God in every member of humanity. The church's task particularly focuses on the status and identity of vulnerable groups.

The church strives to build peace among different faiths, working for peace between religions and together with various religious groups. The road to reconciliation between different groups and individuals is often hard to travel. It may take several generations for communities to fully recover from traumatic experiences such as war. To dismantle harsh forms of oppression it may be necessary for parties to get some distance from the situation before they can start to address past events. It is not possible to insist on granting forgiveness or being forgiven, but for reconciliation to be durable these processes may be needed at some level. The message of peace builds security, reduces hatred, and gives hope for a better tomorrow.

## **Operating principles**

We believe that justice and peace are inseparable, and that justice is a prerequisite for sustainable peace. We understand that reconciliation work takes time. During this time former conflict parties must build trust and learn to live together, forgive, and create a stable peace. This may happen between communities and individuals, or on a cultural, social, religious or political level. The process involves simultaneously seeking truth, justice, peace and mercy. Reconciliation is near at hand wherever these four virtues can be found together.

We work for peace and reconciliation with and through our partners. We work alongside our partners and strive to strengthen their capacity to promote peace and reconciliation. This practice is based on the idea that the best way to work for permanent peace and reconciliation is to trust local actors. Peace and reconciliation are not importable commodities, and no one can promise reconciliation on someone else's behalf.

Our peace work is based on human rights. Human rights principles – including the universality of human rights, equity, equality, non-discrimination and responsibility – are duly considered throughout the planning, implementation, monitoring and assessment of our peace work. We particularly consider the needs of vulnerable groups and their rights in conflict situations and peace processes. This is especially realised through our advocacy work, and by supporting the participation of these groups and the strengthening of their resources and knowhow.

In our work we recognise the link between security and development. We also acknowledge that development cooperation and humanitarian aid may have negative impacts in conflict situations. We strive to account for the possibility of conflict in the areas where we operate. This policy, known as conflict sensitivity, is not part of peace work itself, but it is an important element of responsible operations in conflict settings. We recognise the independence and neutrality of humanitarian aid, and we carefully assess how we can best operate in conflict zones. Conflict analysis forms part of our assessment of our operating environment in the countries where we work. It helps us to understand the connections, parties and issues behind conflicts, and to identify how our activities and conflicts may affect each other.

In our peace work we strive to strengthen churches, religious leaders, communities and other actors within civil society, to enable them to prevent conflicts and promote peace and reconciliation in their own communities. We reinforce local ownership of peace by expanding participation and by ensuring that different voices can be heard during peace and reconciliation processes.

In all of the work we do with our partners – including church work as well as development cooperation – we strive to prevent conflicts by combating inequality, discrimination against minorities, and corruption. We also conduct activities whose main purpose is to prevent conflicts. These activities may involve providing peace education or support for religious and other communities to enable them to resolve conflicts and disagreements peacefully. Such work aims to eliminate any sense of otherness, to build trust, and to create connections between different groups.

We support conflict management at different levels of society, to make sustainable peace and development possible. Peacebuilding actions must be coherently planned, taking into account the long-term nature of such work, the needs of different parties and the local context. It is also important to ensure that processes have local ownership and are carefully devised to address the disagreements and structural injustices that lie behind the conflict. Such well-planned actions often prevent the later reoccurrence of conflicts.

Peace work must be realised at various levels in today's complex conflicts. The concept of multitrack diplomacy is widely applied in peace work. Track 1 diplomacy typically involves official negotiations between high-level leaders, aiming for concrete agreements. Less official dialogues, realised through Track 2, aim to build trust between different parties such as the leaders of religious groups or CSOs, and to prepare for higher level negotiations. Track 3 diplomacy operates at the community level, striving through unofficial processes to strengthen dialogues and mutual understanding between different people and communities. Some peace workers also use the term Track 1.5 to refer to discussions held between influential parties, often including high-level politicians, which are nevertheless unofficial in nature. To build durable peace, work must often be done simultaneously on all of these tracks. At Felm we primarily work in Track 2 and 3 diplomacy to help local actors build trust and dialogue, and to strengthen their capacities.

Post-conflict reconciliation processes and concurrently provided psychosocial support also form part of our peace work. We understand that successful reconciliation necessitates social structures that do not set people against each other or give them unequal statuses, but which support the realisation of reconciliation between individuals and communities. This work is closely related to justice and may involve many challenging issues relating to impunity, truth and forgiveness.

Our peace work also includes technical support for civil dialogue processes, through which we strive to resolve the causal factors behind conflicts, and to get citizens extensively involved in dialogues concerning their country's future.

Although local actors have a key position in national peace processes, the international community also has a role and a responsibility to promote peace and security. For this reason advocacy also forms part of our peace and reconciliation work. Our advocacy activities aim to draw the international community's attention to prolonged and destructive conflicts, and to reinforce global responsibility for their resolution.

Peace can only be achieved through cooperation between different actors. We work together with our ecumenical partners, representatives of other faiths, peace organisations and international organisations to find sustainable solutions.

We encourage and help churches to develop their own peace work. Religious institutions and individuals can play a key role in peace and reconciliation processes, since they respect life and human dignity. Churches should express their conceptions of right and wrong, help to protect victims,

and create dialogues between opposing parties where this is possible. Churches can also act as intermediaries in conflicts in the name of their inalienable human values.

### **Bringing added value**

The added value that we bring to peace work relates to our collaborations with local churches and CSOs. Our partners are able to reach vulnerable and marginalised groups who are often left outside peace processes. Our extensive local networks advantageously give us access to the grassroots level and to people who are seldom involved in peace processes. Our long-term commitment builds trust and puts us in open contact with local communities. A long-term presence, skills in local languages, and an awareness of local cultures all facilitate dialogue and mutual interaction within local communities. Peace processes can easily seem remote to ordinary citizens. We can encourage churches and our other partners to take peace work to the local level.

The strengths of our activities also include dialogue processes that effectively build trust. In our conflict prevention work we utilise dialogues between representatives of different faiths. During conflicts we work both at the grassroots level and at the level of Track 2 diplomacy. When a conflict is over, we focus on peacebuilding and promoting reconciliation. When listening to the needs of our partners within our peace work we often have to carefully consider how much we should publicise our work, since in many cases it can be helpful for them if our work is not publicised.

As a church organisation we have significant expertise in understanding the importance of religious beliefs in societies outside the rich western countries. This enables us to reach the representatives of different faiths both abroad and as the partners of parishes in Finland.