

September 10, 2001

Franciscans International

Comment on Durban Racism Conference

Franciscans International and the following NGOs - Pax Christi International, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Congregation of St. Joseph, Medical Mission Sisters, Asian Women Human Rights Council, Global Education Associates, Vivat International, Congregation of our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Center of Concern, International Presentation Association and Refugee Project, Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, Cordaid, Commission of Justice and Peace of the Netherlands, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council - are honored to present this statement to the WCAR.

The thousands of people gathered in Durban, representing millions of others, constitute enormous political will demanding: Eradicate racism!

As Catholic organizations with presence in all corners of the world, we commit ourselves to work to eradicate the racism that endures in our own institutions and to pursue reparations that restore right relationships.

We urge you too, to take bold, concrete and measurable steps to:

- adopt a meaningful and forward-looking Program of Action;
- commit yourselves to work with civil society including those sectors most discriminated against, on concrete and practical National Plans of Action;
- provide adequate resources for the High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish a specific unit within her office dealing with racism and related intolerance.

Racism has expressed itself historically in a myriad of tragic ways; and, within every arena, women are suffering multiple discrimination because of their gender. And the damage goes on.

The industrial wealth and technological advantage of some nations have been built in significant part upon slave labor and colonial resources.

As a result, the current processes of trade liberalization and globalization, compounded by excessive military spending, are exacerbating poverty. Justice demands that this situation be reversed.

Human rights, essential social services, including access to health care and essential medicines, - especially for communities ravaged by HIV/AIDS - must be given priority in the development process over the principles of economic liberalization and intellectual property rights.

The essential elements of reconciliation are truth telling, an acknowledgement of guilt, a request for forgiveness and reparation for damage done.

The Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace has noted, "Reparations should erase all the consequences of illicit action and restore things to the way they would most probably be". This presents a strong challenge and a worthwhile benchmark for the work of this conference.

Therefore, we call on the World Conference and Member states to:

- create mechanisms by which this restoration can be accomplished, such as a Truth and Reconciliation Commission;
- restore land to those dispossessed;
- cancel debts;
- support and promote education in human rights that combats racism and creates a culture of peace;
- return cultural inheritance from museums; and
- make space at important decision-making tables for the victims of racism.

We urge you to remember the millions of voices calling upon us for a world free of racism and intolerance as you make the decisions before you this week.

We pledge our support for every concrete step toward reconciliation based on the eradication of racism and its pervasive effects – and our vigilant attention to the fulfillment of commitments made at this Conference.