

A MESSAGE BY THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE
THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL WEEK FOR PRIESTS

The international community should not accept the imperialistic takeover of foreign territories

The partekars of the XXXIII (23rd) Theological-Pastoral Week for priests, held in Zagreb from the 26–28 January 1993 in organization with the Catholic Theological Faculty in Zagreb, examined the theme of »EXILES AND REFUGEES – THE CARE OF THE CHURCH«. As a result they announce publicly to Croatia and to the world the following:

1) The aggressive and imperialistic war forced upon Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Yugoslav Greater Serbian authorities causing the demolishing of cities and villages along with the destruction and looting of ones own cultural heritage and also the death of approximately 140.000 civilians among which include a large proportion of children. Planned ethnic cleansing and genocide of Croats and Muslims is still executed without a reduction of intensity. The war has also forced the exodus of hundreds or thousands of people who have fled and are still fleeing, leaving their life-long homes in search of security in Croatia which has become a land of refuge for the exiles and refugees.

Presently the Republic of Croatia is providing for approximately 400.000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina amongst which there are about 80% Muslims. On top of this the Republic of Croatia is still housing 264.000 of its own exiles who have fled occupied areas of Croatia. For these exiles and refugees the Republic of Croatia sets asied 18% of its own budget. Besidesthat around 300.000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina have passed through Croatia to third countries, and who have in the Republic of Croatia, been materially catered for either for a short or long term basis. As a consequence of the war we can add the problem of broken families, the question of accomodation and welfare of exiles and refugees, the question of their evangelization, spiritual care, charitable works and resocialization. A specific problem is that of the systematic destruction of the human being and the personal dignity through sexual violence.

2) The Church and its institutions, clergy and its faithful are doing all they can to allieviate the effects of the war. The gathered priests and participants at

the Theological-Pastoral Week have spelt out that the Church offers spiritual and charitable assistance to the exiles and refugees, so as to gather them and through its consoling trying to allieviate their personal hardships and problems.

This particular spiritual and charitable assistance has been somewhat handicapped in Southern Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina due to the inability of communication since that region of Croatia is still under the occupation of Serbian paramilitary units. The liberation of these particular regions will allow a normal delivery for survival of about 180.000 refugees and exiles south of the Maslenica Bridge. This region surrounding the Maslenica Bridge is part of a sovereign and internationally recognised Republic of Croatia and it is an absurdity and an extreme tendency to call the Croatian liberation action of its occupied territory an »aggression of Croatia«.

An enormous amount of assistance is given by Croatian emigrants through the channels of the Church's charitable institutions to the exiles and refugees. However, the Church's work through the specific nature of its mission and inadequate material resources remain limited.

3) Resolutely, the participants of the Theological-Pastoral Week direct to all people of good will, the governing authorities and civilian institutions call and request to more intensively involve themselves in finding a solution to the problems of exiles and refugees. Above all, they stress the need for establishment of the conditions enabling the immediate return of all exiles and refugees to their lifelong homes, regardless of their religious affiliation and nationality, since it can not be allowed that any person is stripped off of their right for their homes and homeland. Along with this is linked the participants' appeal that all the prisoners camps be dissolved within which are kept the exiled inhabitants of the occupied territories. Every postponement of reaching a solution of the problem presents a new crime. Those gathered at the Theological-Pastoral Week for priests hence, publically turn to the world. They thank all those who have given wholeheartedly their help and support for the exiles and refugees, however, warn them as to the impermissibility of the practices that have stabilised but have not been in harmony with ethical and moral principles, when the accusation uniformly equates the victims with the criminal, attacked with the attacker and the exiles with the pursuers. The lost meaningfulness of basic human and christian principles of justice and truth, they decisively condemn.

4) The participants of the Theological-Pastoral Week adversely reject the possibility of the International community which in silence or explicitly accept the imperialistic conquest of foreign lands with its vital and cultural possessions. As a result of this the participants of the WEEK direct their call to all responsible to do all that is possible to discover the truth of the tragedy concerning the exiles and refugees in Croatia and in solidarity to offer relief so that their difficult problem not only be relieved but definitely solved.

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