

---

# Called to be Peacemakers

---

Even if we restrict ourselves to the briefest of glimpses at the nightly news, it is hard to miss the fact that the world is a violent and conflict-torn place. According to the Canadian-based research group, *Project Ploughshares*, thirty-eight serious conflicts directly affecting the lives of millions of men, women and children are currently taking place across the globe. In Africa, wars rage across whole regions, drawing everyone - even the youngest of children - into the conflicts deadly embrace. In the Holy Land, brutal violence is inflicted by neighbour upon neighbour, in a tit-for-tat war that has crossed the generations. In Latin America, poverty begets violence and destruction between the 'haves' and 'have nots', whilst in the Gulf, British and American troops continue to fight daily in the

aftermath of the recent Gulf war. And increasingly, the so-called 'war on terror' is having a impact on all our lives. War seems to have become the tenor of our lives, violence the very basis of our culture. Recognising this, the World Council of Churches has instituted a Decade to overcome Violence, whilst the United

Nations has also declared that 2001 - 2010 should be a decade devoted to creating a Culture of Peace.

As individual Christians and local churches here in the UK, we want to respond positively to these peacemaking initiatives, to

work for an end to conflict and for international reconciliation. Yet it is hard for us to face up to the reality of the amount of conflict and violence in the world. It makes us feel both helpless and hopeless

As followers of Christ we are commanded to love and called to be peacemakers.

and it is perhaps easier to focus our time and energy on problems closer to home. Nevertheless, as followers of Christ we are specifically commanded to love, and called to be peacemakers. Whilst it is not up to us alone to bring peace to the world, our task is to proclaim Jesus' message of peace, justice and nonviolence and to act here and now according to that message. In our violent world, it can perhaps be seen as the 21st Century mission - to commit ourselves to being faithful to the call to be peacemakers.

## What is Peacemaking?

In reflecting on questions around conflict and peacemaking, as Christians we need to look to our primary source for inspiration and practice; the Bible. Whilst we do not have the space here for a



---

*The peace sown by peacemakers brings a harvest of justice. (James 3:18)*

### The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.  
 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.  
 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
 for they shall be satisfied.  
 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.  
 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.  
 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.  
 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
 Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.  
 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt 5: 3 - 12)

detailed, in-depth bible study (see resources) it is right that we should look briefly at peace in the Old and New Testament, for as liberation theologian Carlos Mesiters said 'we do bible study not to understand the bible, but to understand our lives'.

### The Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*, which can be translated literally as 'wholeness, well-being' and 'right relationships'. From the very first few verses of scripture, we know that God created us in his image to live in *shalom* - to live together in fellowship with Him, with each other, and indeed with all creation; a true vision of peace on earth. Yet within a few verses, the story of the Fall illustrates that through sin we have become alienated from God and from each other.

Deep within our being we know that we are not suppose to live divided. We long to be reconciled with God and each other, for an end to conflict and war, to live in *shalom*. The books of the Old

Testament contains many visions of this coming peace and reconciliation. The vision is not only that swords are beaten into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:1-5; Micah 4 :1-5) but also that people are secure under their own vines and fig trees (Micah 4:5) and that even old enemies, such as the lion and the lamb, will live together in harmony (Isaiah 11 :6-9).

The prophets called on the people to live by the Covenant, to resist domination and oppression and to live in harmony trusting in God.

In other words, the Old Testament understanding of peace is based on the right relationship between people and God, with each other and, indeed, with the whole of creation.

Of course, there are images in the Old Testament that are violent and disturbing with their portrayal of a vengeful and violent God. Indeed whilst we hold tight to the promise that swords will be beaten into ploughshares, other passages speak of ploughshares being beaten

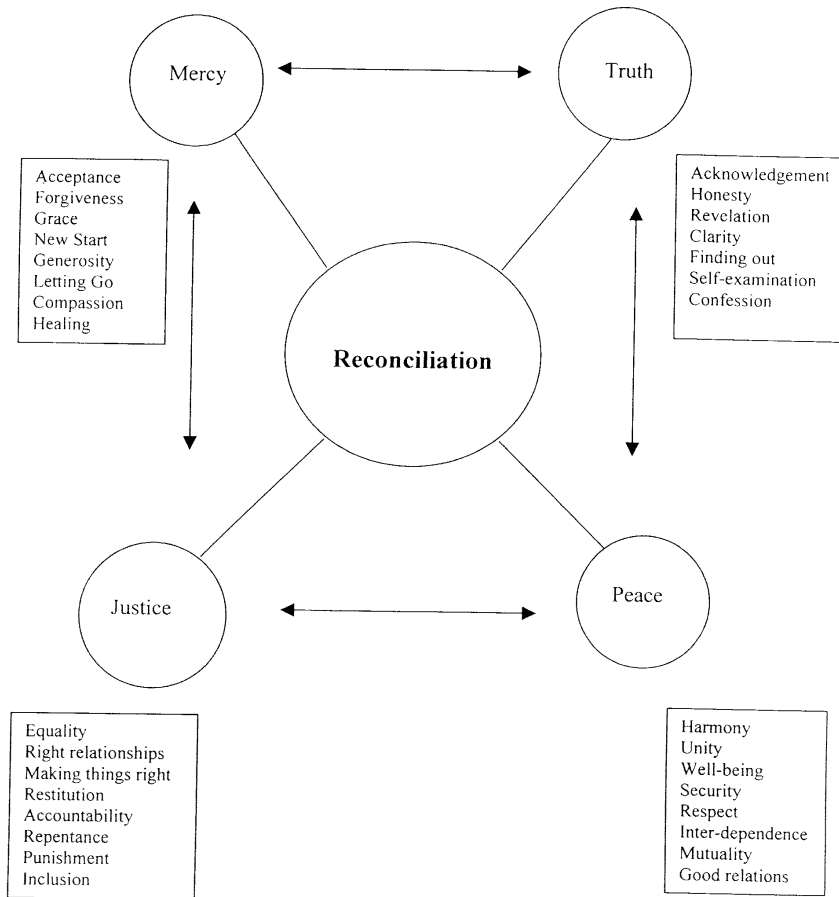
into swords (Joel 4:10) and of the need to take an 'eye for an eye'. However it is important, to remember that all Biblical quotes must be put into context. The passage from Joel for instance, is a passage of judgement on warmongering nations, whilst the 'eye for an eye' saying is imposing limits on violence, not an exhortation to use violence as a solution.

### The New Testament

Through the New Testament, we come face to face with fullness of God's revelation to humanity: the person and the life of Jesus. God is the God of peace, and Christ is the Prince of peace, the way to peace and peace itself (Eph 2:14). The overall message of the New Testament is of the reconciliation of humanity with God and with itself. In the past Jesus' words have been seen mainly as 'spiritual' and not applicable to the real world. Yet Jesus and the apostles lived in a world no less violent and conflict ridden than our own. The reality is the Jesus' message of peace was not spoken in a vacuum but rather in relation to concrete problems and concrete solutions. Again and again, from the Temptations to the Cross, Jesus rejected armed force. For many, the entire message of the New Testament is summarised in the Beatitudes (above). Again however it is important to realise that the commands are not just meant as examples for individuals to try to follow in a private way, but rather they have social and political implications.

---

Turn away from evil and do right, seek peace and pursue it. (1 Peter 3:11)



### An Eye for an Eye

*'You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer no resistance to the wicked... You have heard how it was said, You will love*

#### Voice of the Victims

"Since martial law started things have been hot. You can't go anywhere. From 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. you can't go out. My brother was shot while getting hay for the cows at 6 a.m. one morning two months ago. He was shot once in the side of his head and once in the left side. After the soldiers came they gathered everyone together. They asked, "Who is he? Do you know him? Is he GAM?" "No, he's my brother." "Bury him!" Then they went back to town." Acehese farmer

*your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matt 5: 38,43)*

Jesus clearly and unambiguously rejects the ethic of retaliation, revenge and retribution in favour of an ethic of love. It is not a call to be passive or acquiescent, but rather a call to an active, positive force for good in the world. The call recognises the humanity of all – even enemies and oppressors – and teaches the fellowship of all people as sisters and brothers.

Biblically then, peacemaking is focused on the rejection of violence but includes the wider concerns of nurturing human community and promoting justice.

#### Reconciliation

Peacemaking is also the work of reconciliation; of bridging gaps

between peoples – between women and men, between poor and rich, between black and white. Perhaps we can say that reconciliation is centre of it all – the place where justice, peace truth and mercy all meet (see diagram).

However, in many ways, reconciliation has been seen only as a private or spiritual act, concerning the relationship between two individuals, or between individuals and God concerning issues of personal morality. Now, there is a growing understanding of the social dimension of reconciliation. As David Porter of Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI) puts it, "Reconciliation is a process, an ongoing transformation at the heart of our being and our communities that results in God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven." We need to understand that our work for peace and justice are "dimensions of the pursuit or reconciliation whose ultimate goal is a community of love." (Miroslav Volf)

#### Questions for Reflection

- ▶ Do you as individual or does your Church community feel helpless or hopeless in the face of the amount of conflict and violence in the world?
- ▶ Read Leviticus 24:13-23 and Matthew 5: 38-48. Which reading do you think reflects the attitude of most people in our culture?
- ▶ Spend a few minutes thinking about 'reconciliation'. What does it make you think of? Is reconciliation central to the life of our Church community? Our culture?
- ▶ Can you think of any examples of reconciliation, either in your own life or in the international community?

## A World Divided

Whilst most churches regularly pray for peace and reconciliation in the world, many feel that there is little else that can be done apart from donating to humanitarian organisations to alleviate the suffering caused by wars. However the reality is that there is a great deal more we can do as there are *real* connections between what happens here in the UK and wars and conflicts around the globe.

### Connected to Conflict

Most people can remember very well where they were on September 11th 2001 - '9/11' as it has become known. Members of FoR were among around 2,000 people taking part in a protest outside a massive arms fair in London's Docklands. Whilst the fact that there was a huge arms fair taking place here in the UK at the same time as this major act of terrorism was something of a coincidence, it is important to realise that there are real connections between our proliferation of weaponry through the arms trade, our adherence to the values of militarism, and our real insistence – despite all evidence to the contrary – that peace and security is best served by an ability to inflict death and destruction on others. As Christians we know that is false. Scripture tells us that real security does not come from weaponry and violence but from justice. 'Integrity will bring peace', says

Isaiah "justice give everlasting security' (32:17)

The proliferation of weapons around the globe and the resources devoted to the military does not

**The lesson of the last century is that wars cause further wars, fuel deep hatreds and rarely solve problems of injustice or abuse of rights.**

bring peace or security – in fact, just the reverse. The lesson of the last century is that wars cause further wars, fuel deep hatreds and rarely solve problems of injustice or abuse of rights.

### Nonviolence

The vast majority of people agree that the weak must be defended from the strong and this often leads people into supporting armed actions. It is seen by many that injustices can only be righted by violence, such as the armed overthrow of an oppressive regime. History shows us that this is simply not true.

- The injustices of racial laws in the US were corrected by nonviolent actions.
- The apartheid regime in South Africa was brought to

an end without violence

- The Marcos Government in the Philippines was overthrown by mass action of the population without resort to violence.
- The communist dictatorships in East Germany, in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria came to an end without bloodshed.
- Soviet domination in the Baltic Republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia could not resist the will of the people for self determination.

In each example there were different factors at work but there was also great change with little loss of life. Christians need to talk up the successes of nonviolence.

In some areas of conflict or injustice Christians have been personally involved in trying to reduce tension and in peace-making. For example, both Christian Peacemaker Teams and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel have provided support to threatened communities. Christian groups have been at work for reconciliation in many other parts of the world.

Perhaps we need to see a new way of taking pride in our country. In the past our patriotism has been based on the strength and fighting qualities of our armed services. Perhaps we could say that a new

---

**Integrity will bring peace, justice give everlasting security (Isaiah 32:17)**

patriotism would take pride in the abilities of our negotiators to resolve conflicts, in the wisdom and generosity of our financiers to advance true development and in the courage of our diplomats to expose and confront oppression and injustice. Perhaps we should look to Norway as our model for work in peacemaking and development and not to the USA.

Martin Luther King said “The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Rather than contributing to ‘the light’ that drives out ‘the darkness of violence’, in many ways, we as a nation are contributing to a world of violence and armed conflict. In this next section we shall look at three examples which highlight the connections between institutions and decisions taken here in the UK and a culture of violence and conflict in the world: the arms trade, military spending and Ballistic Missile Defence.

### Voice of the Victims

**‘When the soldiers come, everyone flees. The people can’t return to work their fields because soldiers will shoot anyone who comes there. We have nothing, not even pots to cook with, no place to sleep, all the houses have been burned. Everything is devastated.’ Burundian woman**

## The Arms Trade

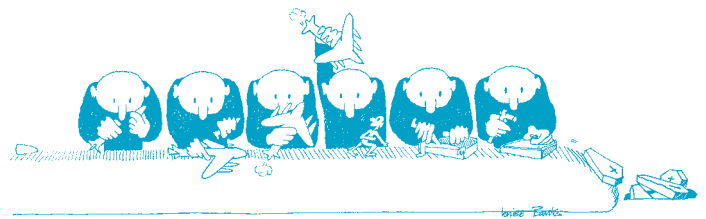
Undoubtedly, the arms trade fuels conflict and leads to an increase in casualties. Indeed, there is a remarkable correlation between the rise of the modern arms trade and the rise in the number of civilian casualties in conflicts. By the end of the 1990’s nearly 90% of war-victims were non-combatants and at least half of these were children. Recent detailed academic studies of arms transfers over a number of years show that the arms trade is a significant element in the likelihood of a country sliding into war. In one study into arms transfers to sub-Saharan Africa, the authors concluded that “arms imports are one of the essential ‘ingredients’ in the recipe that produces and sustains political violence in sub-Saharan Africa (and elsewhere).”

The UK is the second largest arms exporter in the world (after the USA) and has, according to government figures, exported around £27 billion of arms and military equipment in the last five years alone. Whilst the

government argues that it has an ‘ethical’ stance when it comes to arms sales, recent high-profile deals such as the massive contract with South Africa (bitterly opposed by health and development organisations), plying weapons to India whilst trying to broker peace between India and

Pakistan, the controversial deal with Tanzania, and the refusal to put an arms embargo on Israel, shows that when push comes to shove, the government will support arms exports over human rights, sustainable development and conflict resolution arguments.

Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) has identified twenty



countries engaged in serious conflict that the UK has armed since 1997. Whilst these are the worst examples, unfortunately it is only the tip of the iceberg.

Its also worth noting that the arms trade doesn’t just happen. As a nation we are not simply responding to armed forces begging for weapons, but rather we are promoting and pushing them. Salesmen from the various companies and from the Defence Export Services Organisations (DESO) - the government agency which promotes and supports arms exports - travel around the globe promoting British weaponry which inevitably fans regional arms races, fuels mistrust between neighbouring states, and, without a doubt, feeds corruption.

The government also actively supports military exports by giving the arms export industry much more direct support than the civil export sector can expect. This support includes everything from military personnel putting on

displays for potential buyers, to active support from ambassadors and military attaches, to direct financial support. This financial subsidy takes many forms, including the expense of running the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), the cost of Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) cover for arms sales, and the subsidy for military research and development. CAAT estimates that as a nation we are subsidising the arms trade to the tune of around £760 million per year. Whilst supporters of arms exports argue that it benefit the country because of the jobs that it provides, when we divide the amount of subsidy by the number of people employed in arms exports – 70,000 both directly and indirectly – we come out with a figure of about £11,000 per job. Many more jobs would be created if this money was spent on less capital intensive projects.

The supply of vast amounts of weapons around the world has fuelled conflict by raising political tensions, blocking attempts at peaceful solutions and generally increasing the level of violence.

## Military Spending

The sheer amount of money that is devoted to war and conflict is simply enormous. World military expenditure currently stands at around \$800 billion per year. Such enormous figures are hard to grasp and in many ways they can only become understandable by making comparisons. For example, total world spending on development aid is around \$50 billion annually (about 6% of military spending), whilst the World Bank estimates that the extra spending needed to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals is around \$60 billion per year. To prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and care for those living with disease would cost around \$10bn per year (just over 1% of military spending) according to the UN General Assembly. In other words, to achieve all Millennium development Goals and to fund the UN's estimates for preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS would cost less than 10% of world military spending.

The US Defence budget, the largest in the world, is currently

\$350bn but is planned to grow to \$400bn per annum over the next five years. The UK's defence budget is currently £24bn and it too is planned to rise over the next three years to an annual £32.8bn. However it should be remembered that separate from these calculations is the cost of the recent war on Iraq. Estimates from the UK Treasury are that the recent war in Iraq will cost the UK around an additional £3bn but others are saying that it could be as much as £10bn.

Although comparisons are hard to make, the UK is estimated to have the third largest military expenditure after the United States and Japan. As a percentage of GDP, UK military spending is 55% higher than the Western European average and 22% higher than the NATO average. (Figures from UN Development Report, 2003)

### More?

And all this military spending isn't enough. In 2003 the heads of Europe's largest military companies joined together to call on European taxpayers to further increase military spending.

Arguing that Europe is falling behind the US in the spending stakes they said that we must increase our military spending to "remain a credible player in the game".

However it is not just in the US and the UK where military budgets are spiralling upwards. In Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle

### Questions for Reflection

- ▶ "Integrity will bring peace, justice give everlasting security." Do you agree with Isaiah? Is the lack of justice and integrity in our world contributing toward insecurity?
- ▶ If, according to the United Nations statistic, 90% of victims of modern wars are civilians, can war ever be justified?
- ▶ Does the proliferation of weapons around the world through the arms trade contribute towards, or detract from peace and security?
- ▶ What is your reaction to the fact that we are subsidising the arms trade by so much?

Let us then pursue the things that make for peace (Romans 14:19)

### Questions for Reflection

- ▶ What is your reaction to the fact that total worldwide aid to the developing world is only 6% of world military spending?
- ▶ Do you think that the UK's military spending should be 55% higher than other Western European Countries?
- ▶ Do you think the Development of a Ballistic Missile Defence System will make the world a safer place?

East military spending has risen significantly in the past 10 years and according to the respected research group SIPRI, "the post-cold war 'peace dividend' had almost vanished by 2002."

In poorer countries, the economic effect of spending huge amounts on arms is obvious. With fewer resources in the first place, spending money on capital items such as an aircraft or missile system has an immediate negative effect as they do not generate any income. Whereas spending the equivalent amount on machine tools, for example, would of course generate income.

Put simply, military expenditure is not an investment but a consumption of resources that could be put to much better use. A little known UN Report suggests that for an average developing country each £200m spent on arms imports adds 20 infant deaths per 1000 live births, decreases life expectancy by 3-4 years and results in 14 fewer literate adults for every 100 people.

## Missile Defence

One example of massive military spending is the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) project, known as 'Son of Star Wars'. BMD aims to intercept and destroy missiles by shooting them down before they hit their target. The project involves land, sea, air and space-based sensors, radars and missile systems.

Despite its name, Ballistic Missile Defence is not simply a defensive system. The technology that is being developed for BMD - missiles, sensors, high-power lasers etc. - has significant offensive potential. Its purpose is to guarantee the US and its allies the ability to intervene militarily wherever it chooses. BMD also undermines other means of dealing with perceived threats, including diplomacy, arms control and international disarmament. Spending hundreds of billions of dollars on missile technology is a perverse way to address missile proliferation. And of course, the system will consume vast resources - US spending on BMD programmes is at present around \$8bn per year and a recent, respected report estimates the costs of the full BMD system at between \$800bn and \$1,200bn through to 2035. UK involvement will cost the taxpayer billions of pounds.

In order to develop the missile defence system, the US unilaterally withdrew from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, thereby undermining the negotiating of international agreements as a real means to international security. If the world's 'superpower' simply walks

away from negotiated treaties, what example does that give to other countries?

In December 2002, despite warnings from many scientists that it would not work, President Bush announced that the US would deploy an initial missile defence system by 2005.

In Spring 2003 after a US request, the UK government officially allowed the US to begin upgrading some of its military facilities here in the UK for 'Star Wars' purposes. US bases in Britain - RAF Fylingdales and RAF Menwith Hill, both in Yorkshire - are essential to the BMD project. In addition the UK government is also considering allowing the US to base some of its interceptor missiles on UK soil.

At a time when the UK should be committed to eliminating all weapons of mass destruction, co-operating with the Ballistic Missile Defence project is an epic act of provocation - simply encouraging others too to develop bigger and better weapons.

### Voice of the Victims

**"Almost every day here the Israelis shoot at random, so when you hear it you get inside as quickly as possible. Haneen went to the grocery store to buy some crisps. When the shooting started, I came out to find her. She was coming down the street and ran to me and hugged me, crying, 'Mother, mother'. Two bullets hit her in the head, one straight after the other. She was still in my arms and she died." Palestinian mother**

## A Common Security for the Common Good

**A**s this new century begins, few would argue that the world is going through dangerous and violent times. Right around the world the search for security and peace is becoming more and more central to how we live our lives and order our society. However, almost without exception, 'security' and 'peace' have been linked with militarism, arms and a lack of tolerance and acceptance.

According to the dominant philosophy, security comes from being armed to the teeth and being prepared to use violence at all times. Whilst no one would argue that self-defence or defence of another is wrong, as Christians we are committed to so much more. Lisa Sowle Cahill, who has written extensively around these issues, suggests that "Treating the right of self-defence [as paramount], even when exercised on behalf of an innocent victim, .... has a way of insidiously shifting the foundation of the discussion to a different view of the moral life than that embodied in the gospel. The foundation of moral reflection becomes, not a discipleship of love and the cross, but self-assertion and the limitation of the obligation to include, to love, to forgive, to serve."

The reality is that peace and security are intrinsically linked with issues of justice, community and love. Only through relentless pursuit of justice, a rejection of



violence and a faithful commitment to nonviolence, between individuals and within and among nations, can we achieve real security – security for all.

At its very first assembly in 1948, the World Council of Churches declared that "war as a method of settling disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ." Rather than resorting to violence to solve political problems we need to work towards nonviolent solutions. With this still very much in mind, in 2001, the World Council of Churches launched its Decade to Overcome

Violence to coincide with the United Nations' own decade to Create a Culture of Peace. Yet many Christians in the UK are struggling to engage with this work.

Again and again in this briefing we have recalled that we are *all* called to be peacemakers. The work of building peace is not for 'experts' alone but for all of us – every man, woman and child. All of us must participate in the great missionary project – of bringing real human security to the world. As a first step we need to challenge the assumption that each individual or each nation can procure security for itself in isolation from others.

We also need to challenge the structures based in our country that make war and conflict more likely – such as the arms trade, increased military spending and the new Ballistic Missile Defence project.

It is also imperative that we reflect upon the theme of reconciliation and create a richer, broader understanding of the concept. As David Porter puts it: "The people of God are called to be on pilgrimage, to be part of a process, the common theme of which is reconciliation. This is our responsibility in a broken world."



### The Fellowship of Reconciliation

- Supports and affirms all with a commitment to peace and nonviolence
- Undertakes education work within the Christian community on peace, war and conflict issues
- Campaigns in favour of nonviolent conflict resolution and on behalf of victims of war and injustice

For more details contact:  
**Fellowship of Reconciliation**  
 The Eirene Centre  
 Clopton, Kettering  
 Northants, NN14 3DZ  
 tel 01832 720257  
 email [office@for.org.uk](mailto:office@for.org.uk)  
 website [www.for.org.uk](http://www.for.org.uk)