



# GKKE

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*As a joint voice of the two major churches in Germany, the Joint Conference Church and Development (GKKE) was founded in 1973 as an ecumenical platform. In order to raise issues of development policy and to pursue justice, peace and integrity of creation, GKKE organizes consultations and discussion forums with members of parliament and government as well as other stakeholders and seeks the communication with individuals, decision makers and politicians in Germany.*

## Contributions of Churches to Just Peace in Zimbabwe Nine Observations

The GKKE task group “Contributions of Churches to Just Peace in Africa” would like to gain a better understanding of what the churches in African countries mean by just peace. The task group wants to contribute to the current debate on justice and peace in the context of development. Two countries were chosen for case studies: Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

A GKKE delegation visited Zimbabwe from 10 to 18 February 2019. The visit aimed

1. to support church organisations such as the ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference), the ZCC (Zimbabwe Council of Churches) and others in their fight for a just, sustainable and peaceful new Zimbabwe;
2. to engage in a mutual national and local learning process with churches and initiatives to discuss questions on the topic of Just Peace such as these:
  - a. What is the role of the churches in the current political situation and in times of major social and economic challenges?
  - b. How do church organisations contribute to a culture of non-violence and promote Christian values?
  - c. What can the GKKE and its members learn from the churches in order to strengthen their own commitment to Just Peace?
3. to promote an ecumenical exchange and ecumenical cooperation.

After spending a day in Harare, the delegation split into three groups so that the members could familiarise themselves with local church activities in and around Bulawayo, Mutare and Masvingo. The delegation is aware of the fact that its stay in Zimbabwe was extremely short and its observations are very limited and subjective. The following text, however, constitutes an attempt to sum up the most important observations and results of the visit. It contains nine items, each of which describes the analyses of the churches of Zimbabwe, a few subjective observations and the churches' response to them. Each of these nine items is intended to be read individually, thus, there are some redundancies. The delegation would be delighted to receive comments and reactions from churches and partners in Zimbabwe.

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1. The people are not sufficiently protected against violence, despotism and injustice by state structures. The churches offer room to openly discuss the situation. They therefore make a substantial contribution to the development of functioning civil society structures.
2. Churches and church organisations have established a foundation that allows them to act as the central players and mediators in the fight for reconciliation, political cooperation and social cohesion in the current political conflict by initiating regional and local healing of memories processes and launching local peace initiatives.
3. Overcoming the culture of violence, in particular sexual-based violence against women and children, is a central prerequisite for peace in Zimbabwe. The churches can also address this task by taking a critical look at themselves.
4. Women's rights are enshrined in the Constitution. Reality looks different: domestic and gender-based violence (GBV) are omnipresent. Women are working to achieve justice and peace in the churches, in some cases by assuming executive functions.
5. The churches are caught in the conflict of criticising the state while cooperating with it and performing their function as a forum for resistance and opposition. They remain in discussion with the governing authorities, organise the National Dialogue and prepare the ground for resistance and opposition against excesses of power. The risks inherent in this situation are a specific subject of reflection for the churches.
6. The various Christian churches feel that they are called upon to take on a share of the responsibility for peace in different ways. There are some impressive examples of how the churches engage in witnessing peace. At the same time, the churches are also a reflection of society entangled in power relations that violence has produced and are thus perceived with ambivalence.
7. Justice and peace are far-reaching goals of church work, also in terms of their interdependency. While the protection of creation is not equally reflected by the churches, it does find practical expression in the efforts being made to support rural development.
8. Ecumenical perspectives and ecumenical action increase social influence, power and credibility of the churches. The provision of safe spaces is proving to be a strength in the fight for justice and peace.
9. The spiritual dimension is closely connected with the commitment to welfare and peace. People live their spirituality in different ways, but the profound belief in God and common prayer unites them with each other and with God in mutual solidarity. God of life, lead Zimbabwe on the pathway to justice and peace. Provide safety and dignity. Hold your protective hand over the country. Bless Zimbabwe. Amen.

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**1. The challenge posed by dysfunctional statehood: The people are not sufficiently protected against violence, despotism and injustice by state structures. The churches offer room to openly discuss the situation. They therefore make a substantial contribution to the development of functioning civil society structures.**

#### **The analysis of the Zimbabwean churches**

The continuous decline of the economy, the repressive political situation and the limited room for civil society commitment over the past twenty years contrasts sharply with the Constitution Zimbabwe granted itself in 2013. From the international point of view, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), cannot be achieved and international human rights standards are

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being violated. There have been no fundamental changes in the situation since the removal of President Robert Mugabe in November 2017 and the 2018 elections. Omnipresent corruption, even within churches at times, calls the foundation of society into question (according to the ZCC, 2018). On the other hand, the 2013 Constitution provides the basis for constitutional recovery and strong institutions. The role played by the armed forces in the ending of the Mugabe regime as well as before and after the elections of 30 July 2018 is therefore particularly alarming. Zimbabwe sees itself in a crisis whose dimensions are not only political and economic, but also moral and spiritual (cf. various ZCBC pastoral letters).

### **Our observations**

We heard many stories about police violence and military despotism at all three places we visited – dreadful stories told to us by victims, dating back to the 1980s after the liberation, concerning the events in Matabeleland and also the latest riots. We heard that in January 2019, some people were arbitrarily beaten so severely that they remained permanently crippled, while others were arrested not only during demonstrations, but also in their neighbourhoods and detained without charges, just to spread fear and terror.

The Constitution states that the task of the police and the armed forces is to protect the country and its people. However, they are the precise forces that are at present threatening, oppressing and robbing the people. Democracy is only working superficially. There is no transparency and no real separation of powers. The government is using the judiciary, the police and the armed forces for its own interests. Corruption is omnipresent and distrust is rife in society.

Church representatives told us that the people are divided along ethnic lines and that the political authorities are exploiting this division. Secret services and spies are always around when people get together. The system is preserving itself with the aid of the instruments of repression installed under Mugabe.

Basic social services, education and the health service are just as in decline as the economy. Compared to social reality, Zimbabwe's progressive Constitution is adding insult to injury to the situation, yet it is still an important reference for the future.

### **What are the churches doing in this situation?**

The churches are forced to act between the conflicting poles of cooperation and resistance. They are the institutions capable of addressing and documenting past and present experiences of violence. This is resulting in confrontation with the governing authorities. At the same time, the churches wish to protect themselves as institutions. It is therefore difficult for them in certain situations to openly side with the poor and oppressed. The question of how they can do this and when they can and cannot succeed in doing so was repeatedly a topic. Some examples:

- Catholic and Protestant churches are working to spread knowledge of the Constitution among greater sections of the population. The churches repeatedly get involved in the run-up to elections: elections are frequently accompanied by outbreaks of violence. It is precisely in such situations that peaceful conflict management, voter education and the provision of information on people's rights matter.
  - The churches assume responsibility for health and education in the crisis over basic social services.
  - Some churches have responded to the crisis by intensifying their reflection on Bible-based ethics and conduct and have defined political values for the state and society that comply with the Christian doctrine.
  - They complain that people do not get sufficient protection against all forms of conflict and violence. Church institutions such as the ZCC, the CCJPZ (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe) and the ECLF (Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum) are therefore trying to oppose the violence by founding local Peace and Gender Committees, often in ecumenical cooperation.
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- At national and provincial level, high-ranking church representatives (seldom female representatives) are in contact with members of parliament and the government. Talks are held in public settings, one example of such talks are those held during the National Leadership Prayer Breakfast on 7 February 2019, at which the churches tried to bring the government, the opposition and civil society representatives together and to create pressure to achieve national unity and establish dialogue. At the same time, they hold talks with government and opposition politicians behind closed doors.
- The extent to which talks with the Joint Operations Command, that is to say, the association formed by the armed forces, the police and the secret service, can be useful or lead to corruption remains unclear.
- Church representatives point out that the church is most of all rooted at local level. This is therefore the level at which it is able to exert concrete influence. The state and the central government are distant and barely noticeable institutions in the provinces.

**2. Truth and reconciliation as central tasks: Churches and church organisations have established a foundation that allows them to act as the central players and mediators in the fight for reconciliation, political cooperation and social cohesion in the current political conflict by initiating regional and local healing of memories processes and launching local peace initiatives.**

### **The analysis of the Zimbabwean churches**

Before the National Peace and Reconciliation Act was passed in 2018, there was little room for publicly discussing the Gukurahundi massacres that took place in Matabeleland from 1983 to 1985. The same applies to subsequent outbreaks of violence and single acts of violence committed by the police and the armed forces, for example in 2002, 2005, and 2008. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church in particular launched an initiative to document the events and to publicly disclose human rights abuses.

In 2016, church activists such as Evan Mawarire, Martha O'Donovan and Matigari were arrested on charges of inciting social unrest and insulting the president. Following a period of apathy and fear, which also affected the churches, first individuals and later institutions grew increasingly daring (according to the ZCC, 2018).

All sectors of society must contribute towards national healing and reconciliation and the development of criteria for addressing long-term concerns about governance in our country. (ZCBC pastoral letter of 17 January 2019).

### **Our observations**

The excessive violence with a death toll of more than 20,000 people that was committed by the armed forces in the 1980s after the country had been liberated from the Smith regime has never been reappraised and atoned for. It still weighs on the people of Matabeleland like mildew.

But the entire country has experienced violence – for decades or indeed centuries. Colonialism, the declaration of independence from the UK issued by the white apartheid regime in 1960 and the subsequent fight for liberation have left deep traces and collective traumas. Peace and reconciliation efforts must therefore be made throughout the country and be accompanied by a culture of remembrance and documentation. This is particularly relevant as past experiences of violence overlap and blend with present experiences. It was made clear time and again that advocacy must be based on facts in a situation characterised by oppression, even if the goal is to protect those concerned against state persecution.

There is an urgent need for the wounds caused by the past and present acts of violence committed by the police and armed forces to be dealt with – the healing of memories is a prerequisite for being able to take action. We observed that church leaders and members act courageously and consciously at national and local level. Examples of such people are representatives of Justice and Peace Commissions, bishops in Bulawayo and others. Sustained by their faith, they accept great risks. Churches as institutions are rather slow in their

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responses, and a lot depends on the leaders. Difficulties arise when involvement is seen in party politics, which could be observed in the past.

The particular challenge for the churches becomes evident in the following questions: What does it mean for a church to champion peace and reconciliation when victims and perpetrators meet at church services each Sunday? How can perpetrators remain members of the church community? Does the church fail when violence by Christians cannot be prevented?

Our talks were dominated by the latest experiences, and the topic of pre-liberation events was rarely raised (if so, then mostly by political representatives), even though the high degree of readiness to resort to violence – not only on the part of the armed forces and so-called security forces, but also in the home – are certainly rooted in them in part.

### **What are the churches in Zimbabwe doing?**

In the run-up to the 2018 elections, many parishes campaigned for conflicts to be resolved without violence. Since the riots in January 2019, the churches in particular have offered a forum for victims to discuss their experiences and accusations. Victims are encouraged to go public with their stories – the first decisive step on the long road to restoring justice. In many regions, Catholic and Protestant churches have founded and trained local committees and groups (such as the Peace Ambassadors in Mutare or Local Peace Committees in Bulawayo) that unite people from all walks of life, parties and religions. In the latest conflicts in Bulawayo, the churches assumed the important role of a civil society representative that the government could approach and talk to.

These efforts for peace and nonviolent conflict management are resulting often in development initiatives within which people themselves are starting to take action, to negotiate with the authorities and to improve their situations.

“The churches want to and have to ensure that human dignity and rights are respected,” says Bishop Danisa Ndlovu from Bulawayo. “If we remain silent, evil will win. We may place all our trust in God, in him we are safe.”

### **3. Sexual-based violence against women and children: Overcoming the culture of violence, in particular sexual-based violence against women and children, is a central prerequisite for peace in Zimbabwe. The churches can also address this task by taking a critical look at themselves.**

#### **The analyses of the Zimbabwean churches**

Domestic violence, child abuse, rape, murder, robbery and organised violence pervade people’s lives. The (still) massive political violence, which has notably been observed so far around election time, is alarming. This violence also emanates from state institutions, the police, the armed forces and the secret service, as they do not abide by the law. A culture of violence takes a long time to develop. To combat it, we must understand where it comes from. During the colonial days, established social structures and families were torn apart, legislation enacting racial discrimination was passed, and a cash economy was imposed. After the liberation, too little attention was paid to the fact that the culture of violence continued to exist and authoritarianism was emergent. Violence thus remained the means for asserting power, just as it had been during the underground struggle (according to the Archaeology of Violence, 2010).

#### **The analysis of the Zimbabwean churches**

A ZCC study notes that religious leaders take action against violence, but frequently confine themselves to issues of gender-based and domestic violence. According to the study, this is easier and less threatening than raising the topic of political violence. It is thus crucially important for religious leaders to be made more aware

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of human rights in the context of gender-based violence (GBV) and so to indirectly also raise public awareness of the topic.

### **Our observations**

GBV is a crucial topic in the context of peace, as violence against women and children, domestic violence, is widespread. A female church representative in Mutare said, "There is endemic sexual violence against children. An entire generation has been affected." The extensive absence of men may be one of the reasons for the degree of violence within families. Due to the work and deprivations on remote big farms and in the mines, the men have to put up with many disappointments which are often associated with violence. They take these frustrations home with them. We noticed a readiness to talk and reflect about GBV even in the presence of visitors.

When we visited a project in the Bulawayo region, the reduction in rape was cited as the most significant success achieved by the local peace committee. In this specific case, several rapes had taken place along the road from the village to the local school. The committee organised the people, got in touch with the police, caught the offender and took him to court. As a consequence, the rapes stopped and peace returned to the village.

We were told that during the riots in Bulawayo in January 2019, rapes were also committed in the street. We heard the testimonies of victims of these riots in various places, among them Mutare and Bulawayo. Their testimony clearly shows that the armed forces took action against demonstrators and bystanders and later entered the neighbourhoods in order to intimidate the people.

Local peace committees in Bulawayo and the Justice and Peace Commission in Mutare bring the victims of the January riots together to help them share their stories with each other and the public. We heard that among them, there is a woman whose husband died in the riots. Now she has to make her own living for herself and her little children.

The culture of violence that is still visible today is certainly also a legacy of the colonial days. The fight for liberation was marked by massive violence. The situation is unchanged to this day. All in all, however, we found that colonial history is rarely discussed. In Matabeleland, the atrocities committed after the liberation are much more important in the dialogue than past experiences of colonial oppression. Bishop Paul explained that the colonial structures had only been overcome a generation ago, but were crucial for understanding the current situation.

Can offenders remain members of the community (*communio*) in view of the extreme severity of the acts of violence committed? On the other hand, the churches offer room for people to talk and to venture small steps. However, are the churches really able to contribute to just peace in the face of such violence?

### **What are the churches in Zimbabwe doing?**

Catholic and Protestant churches are providing education on and trying to raise awareness of violence in every form. Peace ambassadors and committees are being trained in many places. These groups are uniting people who differ in terms of affiliation to a political party, ethnic background, age, gender and function and showing that it is possible to maintain an exchange on various topics across these dividing lines.

The churches see the family as the place at which basic values are conveyed. Social services, in particular in the education sector, play a complementary role. The churches run numerous schools, colleges and universities. Domestic violence and GBV are already important topics in the churches, but sexual abuse of children does not yet receive enough attention.

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**4. Central importance of the role of women: Women's rights are enshrined in the Constitution. Reality looks different: domestic and gender-based violence (GBV) are omnipresent. Women are working to achieve justice and peace in the churches, in some cases by assuming executive functions.**

#### **The analysis of the Zimbabwean churches**

The 2013 Constitution stipulates extensive women's rights, yet reality falls far short. According to a female church representative, reasons for this are the continued existence of hierarchical patriarchal structures and the exclusion of women from social and political processes.

Women experience systematic suppression and have no voice in public life. The churches are committed to the principles of inclusion of men and women and the recognition of their mutual dependence. Their view is that gender roles are diverse and shaped by culture and can be changed through society. (The Zimbabwe We Want)

#### **Our observations**

Women play powerful and pivotal roles in many areas. There are very well-trained Catholic female nurses, pastors and theologians, but they are rarely found in executive functions. Even if they do have important functions, as in the Catholic Church (e.g., in the education sector or in handling financial and administrative matters of the Bishop's Conference), they remain background figures. In (most) Protestant churches, women can be ordained, yet the only female Protestant bishop is a young woman in a Pentecostal church. Women in Zimbabwe are clearly under-represented not only in society as a whole, but also within church structures in both the Catholic and the Protestant Church. There can be no talk of gender equality.

Established and consolidated by the colonial system, it is still common in everyday life for women to look after the family and run the house. They are frequently exposed to domestic violence. We observed in Masvingo, Mutare and Bulawayo that peace and development initiatives as well as local church networking are contributing to empowering women and girls. Not only are they members of the groups there, but they frequently assume executive functions, too.

Being those most affected, women seem to be the first to understand the relevance of peace work. Both men and women are hugely affected by government violence, either directly or indirectly (a woman, for instance, when she loses the father of their children, as shown by an example in Mutare).

#### **What are the churches in Zimbabwe doing?**

At the local level, domestic violence and GBV are discussed and dealt with in the parishes. The churches are committed to gender equality in principle, in their churches, in politics and business as well as in society as a whole.

They work with women's organisations such as Women and Law in Southern Africa. However, preaching non-violence must go hand in hand with protecting and defending victims.

**5. Proximity to and distance from the system: The churches are caught in the conflict of criticising the state while cooperating with it and performing their function as a forum for resistance and opposition. They remain in discussion with the governing authorities, organise the National Dialogue and prepare the ground for resistance and opposition against excesses of power. The risks inherent in this situation are a specific subject of reflection for the churches.**

#### **The analysis of the Zimbabwean churches**

In view of the crisis, the churches have pressed for the implementation of the Constitution. They have formed alliances with other civil society players in order to advance democracy and the vision for the country outlined

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in the 2006 document entitled “The Zimbabwe We Want”. It should be borne in mind that the November 2017 demonstrations were only successful after the armed forces intervened. The army was able to highlight its power and obtained legitimacy through the popular actions.

Religious leaders play an important role when it comes to influencing and expressing public opinion; after all, 80 percent of the people see themselves as Christians. Religious communities are highly respected and trusted. They offer protected places where people can meet and show critical solidarity and public commitment, even if there are informers in churches.

At a time when the economy is on the verge of collapse, the church is standing up for human dignity and economic justice and provides basic social services.

Churches bring together different social groups in dialogue. Raising voices together has had a long tradition, from the Lancaster House Agreement that was negotiated in 1979 or the Unity Accord that put an end to the massacres in the Midlands and Matabeleland in 1987 to the drafting of the Constitution in 2013. Both the Catholic and Protestant Churches have good international connections; this provides them protection and strength.

### **Our observations**

Civil society has been experiencing restrictions of all kinds since the early 1980s – despite a progressive Constitution. Under these circumstances, the churches remain firmly established civil society institutions, capable of resisting even a repressive regime. They are not only established in Zimbabwe, but also anchored in the world at large and enjoy a certain measure of protection. Churches have always been and continue to be forums for resistance and opposition. They offer room in which people can speak freely, including for and with other civil society structures. Dialogue forums hosted at different places bring the government and other players together.

One example is the National Leadership Prayer Breakfast hosted by the four church umbrella organisations on 7 February 2019 with the objective of creating pressure to achieve national unity and establish political dialogue without violence. Several hundred representatives of churches, parties, the government, the business sector and civil society took up the invitation.

The churches remain caught in the conflict of cooperating with the government and performing their function as a forum for resistance. They have different orientations. Some Pentecostal churches, for example, are pro-government, while others are anti; the levels of activity of regional dioceses vary. Internal factions exist, which allows the government to provoke division. Church representatives are holding talks behind closed doors, but the question is how much and what they can achieve with this. There is a high risk of being instrumentalised or losing the trust of the people if this goes on. The same applies to interaction with the JOC (Joint Operations Command; cf. observation 1).

No matter how impressive the National Leadership Prayer Breakfast may have been, what it brings about remains to be seen. Even if it has only little influence on the political players at the end of the day, it has improved access to decision makers, enhanced cooperation in civil society and generated publicity.

### **What are the churches in Zimbabwe doing?**

As an element of civil society, churches not only have a watchdog function, but also initiate activities and organise people in groups beyond their own parishes. For example, peace ambassadors (there are several thousand in Mutare to this day) from various parties and religions and with functions such as those of a chief or counsellor are being trained. They write pastoral letters and document human rights violations.

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In the framework of the National People's Convention, the four church umbrella organisations bring together politicians and civil society representatives, including trade association representatives, priests, pastors and parishioners.

Churches are working with other organisations, including the ZELA (Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association), the ZIMCODD (Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development), the Centre for Natural Resources Governance and various women's organisations. As a result, they are involved in the national budget review process, in which they speak for civil society as a whole.

The churches are reflecting on how important it is to maintain a sufficient distance to political parties and yet remain in dialogue with them in order to hold them accountable and strive for value-based democracy.

**6. Ambivalence: The various Christian churches feel that they are called upon to take on a share of the responsibility for peace in different ways. There are some impressive examples of how the churches engage in witnessing peace. At the same time, the churches are also a reflection of society entangled in power relations that violence has produced and are thus perceived with ambivalence.**

#### **The analysis of the Zimbabwean churches**

Older reports, e.g. by Misereor and Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World), reveal that the churches in Zimbabwe have not always spoken with one voice. In the Catholic Church, it has often only been individual figures who have dared to utter criticism in public. Divided into political camps, the members of the Protestant Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) were at odds with each other and the council was unable to speak out for many years.

In 2018, the ZCC affirms in a study that many people in Zimbabwe live in a state of profound fear and mistrust of others. Society is fragmented and its leaders tend to pursue their own interests at the expense of society. Who and what is the church in these circumstances?

Since 2010, more and more churches that preach the Gospel of Prosperity in the impoverishing country have been founded. Some African Independent Churches have allied with the ruling ZANU-PF. During the transition period in November 2017, some churches became entangled in the fights between the political factions. All this goes to show that there is always the danger of churches being used by the political authorities for their own interests. Faced with this reality, churches have (in recent years) been rigorously advocating the implementation of the Constitution and a citizens' agenda. At the same time, they have had to confront their inner contradictions and admit that they have not always adequately risen to the challenges. Yet, despite all the disputes and schisms, they have repeatedly succeeded in forming civil society alliances.

#### **Our observations**

We found several times that churches are open to discussion and reflection. We met clerics and laics, simple members and leaders who are committed and champion peace, reconciliation and justice.

#### **Consequences and our reaction**

Looking at the ups and downs of the churches' commitment to society over the past decades and the church landscape as a whole, it becomes evident that far-reaching changes are taking place. A continuous and comprehensive ecumenical dialogue is needed, but cannot be ensured by isolated visits alone. This is where our relief organisations come in: they are called upon to provide personnel and expertise. In the absence of such a continuous contact and the attendant exchange, there is a great risk of the staff of our relief organisations becoming prone to making stereotypical assessments: Christian churches are good, are committed to helping the people VERSUS the claim that churches are not political and fail as soon as their prophetic voice is in demand.

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The church landscape in Zimbabwe is like that in many African countries: it is in motion and must be kept under close observation. This observation must also cover churches that have not emerged from traditional mission churches. The current within the African Independent Churches, Pentecostal Churches, Evangelical Churches, etc. are highly diverse. Different orientations can even be found within the Catholic Church. There is no such thing as *the* Church, but rather multiple voices. In some instances, the effort to achieve unity is successful, and in others, it is not. At the same time, our relief organisations must be in touch with the scientific community and the international ecumenical community in order to ensure that experiences and findings are shared.

**7. The relationship between justice, peace and the protection of creation: Justice and peace are far-reaching goals of church work, also in terms of their interdependency. While the protection of creation is not equally reflected by the churches, it does find practical expression in the efforts being made to support rural development.**

#### **The analysis of the Zimbabwean churches**

The term Just Peace has been adopted by the ZCBC, the focus of the work being done is on social justice, good governance and the overcoming of violence within the state. National unity, peace, prosperity and economic justice are seen as being closely connected. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) serve as an important reference. Peace can only be achieved and sustained if it is based on justice (ZCC).

#### **Our observations**

Churches and church organisations are making a significant and important contribution to justice and peace in Zimbabwe. Peace is development - development is peace; peace-building and participatory development are inseparable and yet require separate approaches.

Cooperative projects are helping to build peace and promote non-violence (as can be seen in Masvingo, where there have been no major outbreaks of violence since 2008). On the surface they are about agriculture, but beyond that, they are about justice and peace. One example of such a project is ZCC's Farming God's Way, which uses methods adapted to climate change. We have also come across the following statement: "You can't talk about peace with a person who is starving."

Likewise, peace initiatives often entail an occupation with further topics and issues that concern the parish or even the whole country. This is illustrated by the example of the Peace Ambassador Programme in Mutare, which brings together different churches, political parties, young people, women, chiefs and others. The lessons learned by the Ecumenical Church Leaders' Forum in Bulawayo also highlight how peace-building becomes a prerequisite for the successful transformation of local communities. They learn to organise themselves and to advance their own development projects.

Peace is therefore not simply an occupation with conflicts, but also with the socio-economic situation. Account must be taken of social and power relations as well as the psychosocial situation of individuals and communities. Traumas lead to non-cooperation, deprive collectives of their capacity to take action and block sustainable development. Socio-economic development is impossible without a minimum of peacefulness, of Ubuntu (community spirit, unity). Nevertheless, which approach is the right one, and what are the first steps in which circumstances? Peace and development require methods of their own, but must relate to each other. Participatory approaches are not synonymous with approaches aimed at conflict transformation, even if they have a lot in common. The question is: Will in the end only small islands of peace be created in a failed state?

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The Africa University, a large church institution in Mutare, is not familiar with the concept of Just Peace. The Just War theory, on the other hand, is a topic of discussion. This debate of the ecumenical community has not yet been taken up.

In practice, however, the concept of Just Peace is clearly being applied, even if it lacks some theoretical foundations. Discussions on the topic are quite sophisticated, and there is reflection on it at the conceptual level, too. Furthermore, there is a link between the national and local debates - the political macro level is present at the local level.

The foreign-policy perspective of just peace is irrelevant. The ecological dimension of just peace, i.e. the protection of creation, is both shaping and threatening peace in Zimbabwe's rural areas, as climate change was a central topic at the very time of our visit. The low rainfall is jeopardising the 2019 harvest and the fear of another famine is all too real.

### **What are the churches in Zimbabwe doing?**

Churches are active politically and locally in projects in all three fields: justice, peace and the protection of creation. They are either directly involved or via church NGOs. Ecological aspects particularly play a role in rural development and agriculture.

### **8. Ecumenical perspectives: Ecumenical action increases social influence, power and credibility of the churches. The provision of safe spaces is proving to be a strength in the fight for justice and peace.**

#### **The analysis of the Zimbabwean churches**

Zimbabwe's church landscape is in motion. In search of a Christian message that appeals to them, people vacillate between Pentecostal and mission churches. The latter still have a relatively strong influence, which adds to their stability and predictability. Young people are increasingly showing interest in the Gospel of Prosperity that is being preached by Pentecostal and other churches. The established churches are therefore under huge pressure to deal with the propensity of their believers to switch churches and also with dual affiliation. (ZCC)

As the country is at a crossroads, the churches have raised their voices and are demanding a national dialogue. Four umbrella organisations - the ZCC (Zimbabwe Council of Churches), the ZCBC (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference), the EFZ (Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe) and the UDACIZA (Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe) - have teamed up as the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations to jointly host events such as a National Leadership Prayer Breakfast to back their appeal for a national dialogue. To this end, they have agreed on a number of goals based on shared theological perceptions (Churches National Dialogue Framework, 2019).

#### **Our observations**

In the face of the crisis, an ecumenical approach is being pursued in terms of political action, as this allows the churches to speak with one voice. This, in turn, is helping them gain influence, strength and credibility.

We observed that the ecumenical idea is gaining strength in all three cities we visited and also at national level. Ecumenical cooperation is widespread at the local level. The churches have no reservations about African Independent Churches and Zion Apostolic Churches. It goes without saying that these churches are involved in local CCJP, ZCC and ECLF projects. It came as a surprise to us to see that some very inspired speeches at the National Leadership Prayer Breakfast on 07 February 2019 came from the UDACIZA.

Nevertheless, the exchange between organisations and projects can certainly be intensified. Ecumenical cooperation has only evolved in the past few years. Before that, the Protestant churches were poorly

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organised under the umbrella of the ZCC. Some very committed Christians responded to this by founding new cooperation organisations such as the ECLF, which exist to this day and are doing an important job.

Our visit was seen as a sign of international solidarity. The public perception of international contacts in a critical situation can indeed have a moderating effect. At the same time, the visit provided an opportunity to promote and intensify the dialogue between the churches.

### **Conclusions for us / the German churches and relief organisations**

There is too little knowledge in Germany about Zimbabwe's diverse confessional landscape. However, such knowledge is an indispensable prerequisite for dialogue. In order to be able to gauge the chances and limits of ecclesiastical and diaconal work and cooperation, it is necessary to take a closer look at the wide variety of churches within the spectrum of the African Independent Churches. At the same time, direct talks and encounters offer all the parties an opportunity to critically examine their positions and to reflect on historical experience before contemplating current events.

Ecumenical and spiritual support and guidance are important expressions of solidarity in times of crisis and political tension as in Zimbabwe. Meetings with victims of the most recent violence during the shutdown in January 2019 were also considered an expression of solidarity. Listening and praying are values in themselves. The church representatives used the protected space afforded by the international involvement to send out clear messages and demands to the security authorities.

An abstract discourse on the concept of Just Peace is only possible and useful to a limited extent. While one could say that the concept is applied in practice, there is not much reflection on it and the theory behind it.

The necessity for Europe as one of the main polluters responsible for climate change to intensify its efforts to mitigate it has become blatantly obvious. This is a matter in which the churches are particularly called upon to raise their voice, as it concerns issues of global solidarity and conduct of life. There are already huge disasters in the region as a consequence of global warming.

**9. Zimbabwe is a Christian country. The spiritual dimension is closely connected with the commitment to welfare and peace. People live their spirituality in different ways, but the profound belief in God and common prayer unites them with each other and with God in mutual solidarity. God of life, lead Zimbabwe on the pathway to justice and peace. Provide safety and dignity. Hold your protective hand over the country. Bless Zimbabwe. Amen**

### **The analysis of the Zimbabwean churches**

God created man in his own image: this concept, in conjunction with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is encouraging the churches in Zimbabwe to stand up for the people, their dignity and their rights. At the same time, they are realising that people live under the yoke of sin and injustice. The Bible tells stories not only of suffering, but also of freedom from suffering and injustice as well as of the universal concept of peace as shalom.

In their joint document for the National Leadership Prayer Breakfast, the four umbrella organisations declared that they were guided by the image of a God who was committed to dialogue and relationships that could be found everywhere in the Bible. As a consequence, their mission and approach must also be based on dialogue. This entails the risk of spiritual overload and potential manipulation. Reason, fairness and justice must therefore form the basis of a theology of dialogue. This is all the more true in the light of the fact that the necessity of dialogue is the result of a crisis in which there is no longer a common philosophy of life and the gap between the people and the ruling elite is widening. A way out of this crisis must be found for the

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country. Living in abundance in God's promise motivates people to contribute to unity, peace, justice and prosperity for all the people in Zimbabwe.

### **Our observations**

We were and are particularly impressed by people's profound faith. Everything they do seems to be firmly embedded in prayer. Even the governor of the province of Masvingo, who is a member of the ruling ZANU-PF party and received us for a short visit, invited us to conclude our visit with a prayer. The Christian faith creates community, because people can only master their everyday challenges together. Christian faith gives the people the strength not to lose hope even in times of the greatest need. Christian faith ultimately lends people's lives purpose and meaning. Devotions, masses, prayer and church services are part of everyday life. There is a distinct spiritual dimension that we are rather unaccustomed to. It gives the people strength. Parishes have an important social function.

The testimonies of the victims of the violent clashes in January 2019 that we heard in Bulawayo und Mutare show that the churches offer them a protected space and unite in prayer with them. This space also allows people to talk about injustices they suffer and lies they are told. This way, public attention is gained and criticism is voiced - and injustice is referred to as what it is. There is already a spirituality of peace, but it can be further developed in terms of its political dimension. Christian values shape the activities of the churches, their work as advocates and their efforts for development. A female church representative in Mutare told us that the church has been fighting violence for 20 years, but asked what had really been achieved, she answered "We are failing in a country full of Christians!"

### **What are the consequences?**

The spiritual dimension is closely connected to commitment to welfare and peace. They go together. The people derive strength and hope from spirituality. Praying allows them to share their worries and needs with God and with each other. People live their spirituality in different ways, but the profound belief in God and communal prayer unite them with each other and with God in mutual solidarity.

The dialogue with churches and between churches must include the spiritual dimension if it is to find its way to the people at all. This is a field within the overall context of development cooperation in which our church institutions are called upon to play a prominent role. They have established stable long-term relations with partner churches and can act as mediators between religious and secular players. It is the job of our relief organisations to instruct the staff members and ensure that they gain the appropriate qualifications. If nothing else, the spiritual dimension must not be instrumentalised.

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**Abbreviations:**

CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
ECLF	Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum
EFZ	Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
UDACIZA	Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZCBC	Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference
ZCC	Zimbabwe Council of Churches

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