



**Economic and Social  
Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2003/NGO/23  
19 February 2003

ENGLISH, FRENCH AND SPANISH

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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Fifty-ninth session  
Item 10 of the provisional agenda

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Written statement\* submitted by Pax Christi International, a non-governmental  
organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[28 January 2003]

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\*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Written Intervention by Pax Christi International

The Pax Christi International movement was started in 1945 to promote reconciliation at the end of the Second World War and is active worldwide. Through this network, it aims to help resolve conflict situations worldwide and remove the causes of potential conflict. Economic, social and cultural rights are frequently lacking today. For example, in Iraq, ten years of sanctions have caused grave economic suffering to Iraqi people, mostly children and other disadvantaged groups. In Occupied Palestinian Territories, Palestinian people have been for decades deprived of their most fundamental economic, social and cultural rights, namely to govern themselves in their own land. In this connection, Pax Christi strongly supports efforts for a peaceful solution to the issue of Iraq and for a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

With respect to Iraq, Pax Christi urgently calls for a peaceful and diplomatic solution to this conflict. At the same time, Pax Christi International condemns a pre-emptive war with Iraq as both illegal and immoral. War and the threat of war are not acceptable instruments of foreign policy. We are concerned for the dangerous precedent that is set for resolving conflict between nations should a stronger power, be given tacit permission to act unilaterally or to build a coalition of like-interested nations to act independently of United Nations structures.

With respect to Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Pax Christi rejects the logic of violence. It condemns suicide bombings, the acquisition of territory by force, reaffirms the rights of peoples to self-determination, urges the dismantling of Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and arrangements for the right of return for refugees, and calls upon all parties to respect relevant United Nations resolutions and the Geneva Conventions.

The dawn of the 21st century has seen an extraordinary, new phenomenon – the rise of globally orchestrated, broad-based International Terrorist networks that feed on failed societies where the deprivation of economic and social rights is pervasive. Until now, the international community's response was military action, police work and intelligence activities. This will result in a few terrorists being rounded up and many innocent civilians being killed; but it is unlikely to make any lasting impact on the terrorist networks so long as the root causes of terrorism are not addressed simultaneously. Terrorism is rooted, amongst others, in a feeling of helplessness and despair resulting from poverty, humiliation and denial of basic social and cultural rights. Its ultimate defeat, therefore, will require the conquest of poverty and the restoration of economic, social and cultural rights to all oppressed people. The dignity of all peoples should be respected.

The achievement of this objective requires enlightened policies and sustained effort at the level of both national governments and the international community. The security of the entire international community demands that weaker governments be assisted in building up institutions capable of effective political, social and economic management. In recent years, the subject of good governance has moved to the top of the development agenda and is recognized in most countries as a sine-qua-non for national advancement. However, good governance cannot be carried forward without adequate resources for states to be able to provide the minimum of essential social

services in fields such as health and education. In addition to mobilizing domestic resources, Third World countries should be enabled to secure the needed foreign exchange resources from (a) just prices and unfettered opportunities for their exports and (2) the alleviation of the crushing burden of unjust external debt servicing. In this sense the Human Rights Commission has a stake in trade liberalization and debt relief measures. It should provide active support to the organizations directly concerned with these issues.

Pax Christi deplores the continuing discrimination against many exports of Third World countries – especially textile and agricultural products in which these countries have a competitive advantage. It, therefore, commends the World Trade Organization agreement to provide unfettered access by January 2005 to exports of textile products from Third World countries into the industrialized countries, and hopes that all states will reach this target. In addition, Pax Christi welcomes the ongoing Doha Round of trade negotiations as an opportunity for the industrialized countries to contribute to the basic needs of Third World societies by lowering protectionist barriers in the field of agriculture that inhibit the development of Third World agricultural exports. Mobilizing political support at many levels will be crucial for this purpose, since the dismantling of agricultural protectionism has always been a sensitive issue.

Pax Christi International emphasizes the need for trade to be geared to meet the needs of people and not that policies should be manipulated to meet the needs of trade. We believe that trade must promote human well-being, sustainable communities and economic justice, and that governments must be able to set trade policies to safeguard the rights of all people, especially those living in poverty. In particular, we call for trade rules and practices, which ensure: the right to food for all people; access to water, education, health care, and information on an equitable basis; the regulation of transnational corporations.

Finally, Pax Christi continues to be appalled by the devastating social effects of the International Debt Crisis. It is estimated that for every dollar of grants to the poorest countries, US\$13 finds its way back to lenders via debt service. Many countries pay large part of their GNPs in debt service at the expense of much needed social services. For example, some estimate that between US\$7.5 and US\$15 billion is needed annually to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa each year. Yet, Africa pays out US\$13.5 billion in debt service every year. Debt service mostly includes an interest component as creditors demand exorbitant ‘rewards’ for lending money to poor nations. Indeed, Third World debt has been on the average compounding at over 20 per cent per year between 1973 and 1993, increasing from US\$100 billion to US\$1.5 trillion, respectively. Only US\$400 billion of the US\$1.5 trillion was actually borrowed money. The rest was runaway compound interest. As a solution to this unjust situation, Pax Christi call for all states to establish an International Insolvency Court (IIC) and a sovereign debt bankruptcy mechanism, modelled after the United States of American Chapter 9 Bankruptcy Law for Governmental Organisations.

The Court’s guiding principle should be the application of universal justice and reason rooted in the dignity of a human person. The sovereign bankruptcy process should not be viewed as an act of mercy. Rather, it should be seen as means of disciplining opportunist lenders and reckless borrowers, thereby enhancing the efficiency of

international capital markets. Moreover, it would allow the highly indebted countries struggling with oppressive debt service and foregoing critical domestic spending in health and education to have, as Section 101, Note 63 of the United States of America legal code states: ‘the opportunity to accumulate new wealth unhampered by pressure and discouragement of pre-existing debts.’ This initiative would help improve the lives of hundreds of millions of people living in more than 80 sovereign debtor nations, as they struggle to deal with powerful creditors in forums dominated by creditors. Pax Christi strongly encourages the Human Rights Commission to more actively support this initiative.

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