

NON-VIOLENT ACTION FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Dear Holy Father,
Distinguished Synod Members,
Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Reference is made to *Instrumentum Laboris*, Paragraph #97.

I want to emphasise the importance of working for reconciliation with young people, through a non-violent approach that promotes education for the very poor. I illustrate this with the specific experience of our Community Pope John XXIII in one of our projects in Ndola, Zambia, with street children, in this case with boys.

Our Community noticed the fact that when we went to throw rubbish to a dumping place, we used to find boys there who came to offload our refuse and then immediately started sorting it out. The boys were organised in such a way that the eldest was the team leader and was giving instructions to the younger ones.

The boys were there from morning to evening. The “boss” would sleep there with a few boys, as they were waiting for the rubbish to be dumped even at night. Some of these boys were sleeping there simply because they had no home to go to. Many had been there for 3 to 5 years, and the age range was between 12 and 25 years.

The things collected were sold in the nearby shanty compound (slum). The main interest was in plastic bags, books, clothes, shoes, building materials, kitchen utensils, toys, wires and food. The boys were very aggressive as they were acting under the influence of drugs and alcohol. They pushed away all the people who were passing by. They were involved in grabbing people's bags, raping women, fighting among themselves, beating other boys, even to the point of injuring and killing those who were resisting them.

The police tried many times to use force to remove these boys from that place. But they failed to take them away because the boys also responded with violence in their own way.

Our Community Pope John XXIII developed an interest in the situation and started going to the dumping site every other day for one hour. We talked with them and occasionally took them some food. In the process we became friends, listening to their stories of why they were found in such a dangerous place. Some of the reasons were as follows:

- Most of them were orphans, having lost one or both parents due to various diseases, including malaria or HIV and AIDS.
- No school for them because they had no one to pay the necessary costs.
- No work for them because they had no paper from a school.
- Poverty was the common experience in their homes.
- In some cases, property, including the house, had been grabbed by relatives when their father died, and the children were threatened to be killed using witchcraft if they resisted or tried to go to the police or to court.

This very sad situation prompted our Community to treat the situation with the urgency it needed. We undertook to begin the project “HOPE” or “CHICHETEKELO” in our local language, believing this to be a call from God.

Our CHICHETEKELO project consisted of:

- Providing temporal shelter and food in the evenings, so that they were left to get back to the dumping place in the morning.
- Organising some recreational activities, with the chance then to start talking to them and drawing them nearer to us.
- Establishing links with their families when possible.
- Starting education programmes for boys below 18 years, depending on how far they had gone in school.
- Starting skills training programmes for those above 18 years, of their own choice, e.g., carpentry, auto mechanics, agriculture skills.

Now, CHICHETEKELO is a centre of attraction to both the Government and the local people. Some boys have completed secondary school and are now in colleges, as those with skills have secured regular employment in good companies.

I believe that this experience of our Community is clear testimony of a non-violent act of Justice and Peace in the Truth, whereby people are reconciled among themselves and with their God. Indeed, sustainable resolutions are possible to be found in order for our children to be better protected and be given chance to grow into good people of the world and good people of God.

I urge that this Synod recommend that at the level of SECAM a strong Justice, Peace and Truth Commission be established, to be called upon to respond in areas of conflict for sustainable reconciliation at many levels in our Continent of Africa.

Thank you!

Mr. Chibilo Munshya
Community Pope John XXIII
Ndola, Zambia