

2013 Declaration of Peace by the City of Linz

- What characterizes a city of peace? Among other attributes, it is personal contact driven by mutual respect among city dwellers of different ethnic origins, convictions, religious faiths, skin colors, sexual orientations and cultures. And it's the trust created thereby. Street fairs and festivals designed to foster encounter and togetherness offer a great opportunity to
- make this happen. In 2013, Linz—City of Peace sponsored a large-scale festival that, thanks to the dedicated efforts of many highly committed volunteers, was absolutely exemplary in this respect and a source of encouragement to make it a regular event.

Initiatives like this one become even more essential as modern communications technology—despite all it does to bring people together—also, unfortunately, makes it easier to put other people down. Cybermobbing is what this is called when, for instance, school kids gang up on a classmate online, sometimes with deadly consequences. We ask our fellow citizens to report all such derogatory postings to the proprietors of the particular website as well as their internet service provider and the supervision & security apparatus the provider has set up in order to warn websites posting offensive content and, if necessary, to block them.

- It is also incumbent upon us to oppose another form of violent confrontation in virtual space: cyberwarfare. Furthermore, any and all forms of (remote-controlled) murder via increasingly sophisticated high-tech equipment are just as intolerable as face-to-face violence among
- human beings. But these new ways of killing make it easy for those using them to avoid personally experiencing the consequences of their deeds, and thus lower their inhibition threshold. The claim that such tactics spare innocent civilians has been proven false—hate for those states that find no other means of deterring terrorist groups is enflamed among people in whose midst these killings occur, which in turn supports the recruitment drives of the very organizations the strikes were meant to debilitate.

Moreover, superpowers' extensive use of advanced electronics to implement ever-more-total surveillance of every individual—and thereby going far beyond what is necessary to prevent violence and solve crimes—is something we find terribly alarming and irreconcilable with the democratic institutions that have developed since the 18th century, achievements of which we

can take justifiable pride. Not even George Orwell ever imagined that Big Brother would ever possess ways and means to institute the seamless surveillance of all facets of everyday life that a few courageous whistleblowers brought to light over the course of 2013.

The outbreak of the third multilateral Middle East conflict since the turn of the millennium now looming in Syria will neither proceed with less bloodshed and destruction thanks to these methods, nor will it engender greater success—in the form of stable democracy and peace—than its predecessor incursions in Iraq and Libya and the military intervention in Afghanistan. Violence cannot be a means to achieve peace in the Near, Middle or Far East. The deployment of chemical weapons (by whomsoever) to kill more than 1,400 people was an abominable crime! We welcome the counter-tendency on the part of world powers to return to civil means of conflict resolution. At the same time, we appeal to them to cease and desist supplying weapons to the warring parties and to prevent deliveries of this deadly cargo. That goes for the entire Arabian region and all the other flashpoints of this world.

The EU's political initiatives in Egypt—to conduct talks with all sides in this conflict and to seek potential compromises and ways to end the multifarious deadlock there—is, in our opinion, a promising approach, even if these efforts have not initially been crowned by success. Peace calls for peaceful means, patience and persistence.

But European policymaking also has its dark underside: permitting human beings to die on the EU's southern borders.

When

- fishermen, like those in the Strait of Sicily, are seized by fear of pulling up corpses in their nets and feel themselves forced to mark those areas of the Mediterranean where boats full of refugees have sunk with skull-and-crossbones on their navigation displays,
- as many as 7,000 people a year die on the high seas between the west coast of Senegal and the Canary Islands, according to estimates by Spanish police,
- cruise ships and freighters are advised to change course to avoid areas of the Mediterranean where boats carrying refugees are currently in distress or have already sunk,
- at least 13,500 men and women died between 1993 and 2012 at sea in the Mediterranean or in the minefields separating Greece and Turkey in their desperate attempts to reach the EU,

then, with the mass murders of the 20th century burned into our collective consciousness, we are obliged to raise our voices in protest!

It's high time to consider the causes of these appalling events. They include:

- ➔ the fact that African coastal waters have been almost completely depleted of fish stocks by the trawler fleets of richer nations,
- ➔ the cold-blooded expropriation of the land of countless peasant farmers in Africa by means of so-called land-grabbing—i.e. acquisition of real estate by international agribusiness enterprises using dubious means for dubious purposes,
- ➔ the ruin of small rural markets in Africa as a result of the delivery of the cheap waste products of the European factory farming of livestock,
- ➔ the miserable working conditions offered by many of the multinational companies that constitute the driving force behind globalization, and
- ➔ the exploitation of many countries' natural resource reserves by that country's elites without sharing their take with their fellow citizens.

It's high time to stop spin-doctoring the hunger, the desperation and the sense of hopelessness this yields.

The top items on Europe's agenda should be a concerted effort to replenish fish stocks in African coastal waters, a code of conduct that is binding on all corporations and agribusiness enterprises operating in less developed countries, focusing our demand as consumers on environmentally friendly, regional, seasonal and fair-trade products and thereby vigorously supporting small-scale rural cooperatives and subsistence agriculture in Africa. By way of compensation for the damage that's been done, European countries ought to subsidize educational programs, alternative energy production, drilling wells and building water purification facilities on site with the technical resources available in these less developed countries, and generally foster the empowerment of people that is conducive to self-determination.

Using these ways and means will make it possible to alleviate some of the desperate poverty that prevails in African countries, and that drives human beings to their last resort: risking their lives on the high seas in utterly unseaworthy boats.

*The Peace Declaration 20013 of the City of Peace Linz was unanimously approved
by the City Council of the City of Linz in the session on 21st November 2013.*