



Silencing the Guns

20. May 2020

“Our world faces a common enemy: COVID-19. The virus does not care about nationality or ethnicity, faction or faith. It attacks all, relentlessly. Meanwhile, armed conflict rages on around the world. That is why today, I am calling for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world. It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives. To warring parties, I say: Pull back from hostilities. Put aside mistrust and animosity. Silence the guns; stop the artillery; end the airstrikes. It starts by stopping the fighting everywhere. Now.” (UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres)

We are living through an extraordinary moment in history, sharing a global pandemic in real-time through advances made in technology. However, whilst the world population is facing this common enemy, parts of the world have the added burden of armed conflicts, sustained by the global war economy and culture.

The cost of human suffering, pain and loss caused by war is immeasurable. The emotional, psychological and spiritual scars are eternal. The Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM) can testify to this on the basis of its work in different parts of the world. The IHOM's very establishment stemmed from the realization of the huge need for healing as a highly militarized South Africa emerged from the protracted anti-apartheid struggle, which profoundly impacted all levels of society.

From the outset, the IHOM's work has included working with ex-combatants. Starting from the South African context, this has expanded to cover military veterans in many other countries. Accompanying such veterans on their healing journey has allowed the IHOM to hear their consistent calls for an end to armed conflict and to become aware of the unique contribution they have to make in working towards a world without war, with social, economic and environmental justice and therefore at peace with itself.

Humanity is at a crossroads. We cannot fail generations to come.

The development and use of technologies whose sole purpose is to cause harm, and destruction to people, society and Mother Earth must now be terminated.

Given the above, we the undersigned representatives of the IHOM, the international Healing of Memories Network, partners and friends:

- Fully endorse the UN Secretary-General's call of 23 March 2020 for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world, for armed conflict to be put on lockdown and for common efforts to focus on the most important fight for our lives;
- Welcome Pope Francis's statement of 29 March 2020 in support of the UN Secretary-General's appeal and calling on leaders everywhere to stop all forms of war hostility;
- Support fully the many military veterans with whom we work in their call to stop war and to focus our collective capacities, creativity and resources on tackling our current common enemy, COVID19;
- Believe that the time has come for the nations of the world to 'beat their swords into ploughshares'; in this connection, welcome the news that South Africa's own arms industry is now involved in making ventilators;

- Believe that as countries develop strategies to reopen following the COVID19 lock-down, the dismantling of the global war economy must be considered a priority, with a view to building a new economic environment that ensures food security, healthcare, education and shelter for all;
- Applaud all efforts to end the current pandemic under the leadership of the World Health Organization;
- Condemn governments that would withhold or deny funding to the World Health Organization during this time of global crisis, and call on all governments to substantially increase their funding to the WHO so can they carry out its mandate of ensuring decent public health for all of humanity.

Signed by

South Africa	Fatima Swartz, Director of Programmes, Institute for healing of Memories Fr Michael Lapsley, SSM Founder Institute for Healing of Memories
North America	Gloria Hage Executive Director & Linda Rich Board Chair Healing of Memories
Lesotho	Brother Moeketsi Khomonngoe SSM Coordinator Healing of Memories
Canada	Estelle Drouvin Coordinator, Raoul Lincourt President, Centre de Justice Reparatrice CSJR Montreal Bishop Jane Alexander Anglican Diocese of Edmonton Peter Deslauriers, History Dept. Dawson College, Montreal (retired)
Myanmar	Gum Sha Awng Metta Development Foundation
Zimbabwe	Fr Brian MacGarry SJ, Coordinator Aqua Healing
Namibia	Fr Teddy Lennon OFM Franciscan Healing of Memories
Sri Lanka	Ralston Weinman Program Manager National Christian Council of Sri Lanka/Healing of Memories Priyanka Mendis; Healing of Memories
Luxembourg	Patrick Byrne & Javier Garcia Alves coordinators, Healing of Memories