

# Goal 16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



Some people live in well-functioning countries governed by the rule of law, with freedom of expression and voting rights. Others live in countries with extensive corruption and mismanagement and may not even have a birth certificate. Some live a safe life without fear of abuse. Others live in constant fear of violence. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of peace, justice and strong institutions is perhaps the most comprehensive of all 17 SDGs. According to this goal, the world community should promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

One of the sub-goals under SDG 16 is to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. The World Health Organization defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. Violence is exercised in very different contexts: violence in close relationships, violence against children, sexual violence, blind violence, war, terror, torture and other human rights violations. It is obvious that we must work on many levels if we are going to succeed in reducing violence. We owe it to everyone who experiences violence to do everything we can to achieve this goal.

## Biblical reflection

Peace and justice are key terms in the Bible. They often appear together, reminding us that there is no justice without peace, and equally, no peace without justice. Both presuppose relationships marked by openness and care: "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Psalm 85:11).

According to the Bible, both peace and justice are anchored in God's care for creation. "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful" (Psalm 116:5). Here, justice is not perceived as a cold juridical principle focusing on guilt and punishment, but as action envisaging protection of human dignity and ensuring frameworks for a good and meaningful life. Equally, peace is more than the absence of war; the Hebrew term "shalom" expresses harmony, well-being and joy in good and safe relations.

Against this background, Paul states that the kingdom of God is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17), gifts that Jesus brought near, and that faith anticipates. At the same time, peace and justice are values that we as Christians are called to promote, motivated by the hope that, by the end of time, they will be fully realised. "In accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home" (2 Peter 3:13).

## Challenge

Do you have suggestions for things that can be done to help people experiencing violence in their community?

Is there anything your government can do to combat violence, whether it be war, human rights violations or other types of violence?

## Questions

- What characterises the biblical understanding of peace and justice compared to the common use of these terms? Cf. Isaiah 32:17 «The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.»
- Discuss the statement: "There can be no real peace without justice and no real justice without peace." Use concrete examples from our modern times.

## Prayer

*God of peace,  
We pray that everyone who is subjected to violence and abuse  
Be raised up and find peace.  
Preserve our hearts  
And strengthen the institutions that preserve justice among us.  
Lead our feet onto the path of peace.*

*We commit everything and everyone, into your hands, Lord.  
Amen.*