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CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMISSIONS

'THE GIFT OF FREEDOM: A HISTORY OF TRANSITIONS AND CHALLENGES'

The international workshop of the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions of the Catholic Church has taken place in Vilnius, Lithuania between the 17th and 19th September. The theme was "The Gift of Freedom: A History of Transitions and Challenges", in recognition of the fact that 2010 is a special anniversary for Lithuania, marking twenty years since the re-establishment of independence after the end of Soviet rule.

During this workshop, meetings with people of all ages and from many different backgrounds representing a range of experiences and perspectives took place, giving insights into the difficulties Lithuania has overcome in its struggle for independence and the challenges that remain as a result of its painful past.

Lithuania is a nation whose strong faith and cultural identity enabled it to survive multiple occupations during the twentieth century, culminating in nearly five decades of soviet rule. Between 1940 and 1990 the country lost approximately one third of its citizens. The social fabric of the nation was severely damaged during this time and yet the spirit of its people remained unbroken.

Understandably, scars from the past can still be seen in Lithuanian society today. We were encouraged by the efforts to address past injustices through restitution processes, which provide tangible evidence of a willingness to give recognition to the victims of injustice. The difficulties inherent in ensuring that such processes truly benefit those who have suffered most should not be under-estimated.

These experiences have helped the Justice and Peace Commission of the Church in Malta to reflect on the meaning of freedom and the responsibilities that accompany it. True freedom is not achieved in a moment, but is a continual process. Threats to freedom take many forms: they can be military, political, social, economic or moral. All of us, throughout Europe, need to be vigilant to new forms of threats to freedom.

The Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (Justice and Peace Europe or CEJPC) is a European network that today regroups 31 national Justice and Peace commissions. Each one is established or recognized by its Catholic bishops' conference. The secretariat of CEJPC is currently situated in Paris (France).