

Independent Catholic News

18.7.2011

Cardinal Turkson praises National J&P Conference

By: Jo Siedlecka

'Justice at work - A place of safety, fulfillment and growth?' was the theme of this year's National Justice and Peace Network annual conference which took place at Swanwick this weekend. Nearly 400 representatives from England and Wales took part in three days of talks, workshops, prayer and social gathering.

In a message ahead of the conference, Cardinal Peter Turkson president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace said: 'I wish first and foremost to congratulate the NJPN for holding a meeting to consider Justice as indispensable condition for peace, fulfillment and growth.

'Our world is witnessing the breaking waves of violence in North Africa and parts of the Middle East; and the cry that is heard in the lull, when the explosions cease, and in the smoldering ashes of destruction is a cry for JUSTICE.

'The last African synod made all the participants, not only servants of justice, reconciliation and peace, but also the fashioners of the same. It is the yearning of the continent, where politically motivated conflicts trample it underfoot. It is the fading dream of the population of the Great Lakes region of East-Central Africa; and it is the hope that the new-born state of Southern Sudan will embrace it as both a theological and a social virtue. With prayerful wishes for a successful meeting'.

The conference was chaired by Maria Elena Arana from CAFOD. Speakers explored many different aspects of justice in the workplace, beginning with a talk from theologian David McLoughlin on the social conditions of people in Palestine during the time of Christ, and the challenging things Jesus had to say about this in his teachings. Jon Cruddas MP reflected on the dignity of work. Frances O'Grady, deputy general secretary of the Trades Union Congress discussed ways in which trade unions work to deliver justice at work and in society. YCW president Phil Callaghan gave a powerful reflection on young people entering the world of work in a time of recession. Sheila Kambobe, Deputy Director of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection in Zambia spoke on the plight on migrant workers and small businesses in a free market. John Battle gave brief reflections on Catholic social teaching after each presentation.

Bishop William Kenney, an auxiliary bishop in Birmingham, was present throughout the conference. He celebrated the Saturday evening Mass and chaired a discussion panel. Imaginative liturgies throughout the weekend were led by Fr Martin Newell and leading Australian musician Rod Boucher, from the Catholic Worker Movement.

Workshops explored many issues, among them: 'The Living Wage Campaign', 'Workers in the Informal Economy', 'The UK Arms Industry – Ethical Issues and Alternatives', 'God's Compassion for Women involved in Prostitution' and 'A Balanced Approach – Does your work leave any space for life?'; the challenges facing the global seafaring community; discrimination in the workplace; rural workers; and the impact of development workers in the global south.

There was a fair trade market each day and children and young people had their own lively programme of workshops and activities. They gave a film presentation and also contributed to the liturgies with words, art and music.