

Stop escalation in the Middle East - use the opportunities offered by diplomacy

Bishop Dr Heiner Wilmer SCJ on the current situation in the Middle East

Berlin/Hildesheim, 9 January 2020. *The President of the German Commission for Justice and Peace, Bishop Dr. Heiner Wilmer SCJ, speaks about the current developments in the Middle East:*

“Recent developments in the Middle East give rise to grave concern. Tensions between the USA and Iran have deepened; the escalation spiral threatens to turn into a war. If this is not avoided, not only will countless people suffer, but the countries of the region will be plunged even deeper than before into the downward spiral of hatred, social disruption, violence, terror and impoverishment. A war between the USA and Iran must therefore be prevented. All the forces of diplomacy must be deployed to avoid further bloodshed in the battered Middle East. The two parties to the dispute are primarily challenged here. But the other actors on the world stage - including the European Union - are also called upon to do whatever can be done to prevent people from being burdened with another war.

No one should be mistaken about the character of the Iranian regime: In its efforts to achieve supremacy in the Middle East and to allow the Shiites to prevail in the denominational conflict with the Sunnis, Iran is covering the countries of the region with violent acts of groups and militias close to it. Iran, in its current state, disregards human rights and is an obstacle on the road to a just peace, also in its neighbouring countries.

But the current threat of war also emanates from the USA. Its Middle East policy has for years appeared to be lacking in concept and unpredictable. The contempt of the current president for inter-governmental cooperation and multilateral structures is also contributing to the disintegration of the international order. This necessarily has an impact on the possibilities for dispute settlement and peacekeeping. It is no coincidence that the new round of tensions between the USA and Iran has been instigated by the withdrawal of the USA from the agreement concluded by numerous international powers to prevent or slow down Iran's nuclear programme.

Especially in the present situation I ask the Catholics in Germany for their passionate prayer for peace. Pax et Bonum!