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Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community
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Statement by the COMECE Executive Committee following the attacks in the USA

An Appeal for Justice, Responsibility and the Conversion of our hearts and minds

1. The world was afflicted by a deep sorrow last Tuesday, 11 September. At the very beginning of the new century, evil showed itself still to be a reality of human existence. In Europe, people have expressed in many ways their sympathy with the relatives of the victims and their solidarity with the United States of America. The European Union has committed itself to stand side-by-side with the USA.
2. As Bishops, we stand under the Cross with those who grieve and despair; we call for prayer and solidarity for the sake of the victims. No-one should invoke religion or faith to justify the attacks in the United States. Those who perpetrate, defend or sanction the destruction of human life cannot claim to act in the name of God. There is no justification for violence and destruction, there is no theological foundation for terrorism – not in the Christian, Jewish or Muslim faith. We condemn these acts.
3. In deep sorrow and with grave concern, we, the members of the Executive Committee of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), turn to the political leaders of the EU and its member states with a threefold appeal for justice, responsibility and a conversion of hearts and minds.

Justice

4. All responsible for the attacks must be identified and punished. Our collective sense of justice would be severely damaged if, in the face of this unspeakable wrong, its

perpetrators and instigators were not brought to account. However, our classical categories of justice seem inadequate to address the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. The massive use of force is not an appropriate response for restoring law and justice. Political leaders face the most difficult questions of conscience in this regard. We therefore urge the leaders of the European Union to try to do everything in their power to prevent us descending into a spiral of retaliation and war.

5. A great and unprecedented injustice has been done. Injustices exist in the world; they are the source of many political and social conflicts. The world is divided into rich and poor, and not by religions and cultures. The present challenge lies in a new policy of development for the poorer countries. One way to establish more just global structures and to reduce material poverty can be found in new forms of global governance. The greatest danger in this challenge is that we give up the vision of a just and peaceful world. The aim of globalisation should not be the wellbeing of the few, but justice for all.

Responsibility

6. We warn against apportioning collective blame. The attacks in America were barbaric – they contradict both Christian and Islamic notions of civilisation equally. We strongly condemn any prejudice against the Islamic faith and its culture. Our shared faith in the one God leads us to a moral duty to pursue dialogue between Christians, Jews and Muslims. Many Muslims live in Europe, and Islam is part of Europe's religious heritage.
7. Terrorism – whatever its motivation – represents a real and lethal danger. The international community must co-operate in a spirit of trust to eradicate the menace of terrorism. We welcome the announcement by the European Commission that it will shortly present proposals to the Council of Ministers to strengthen co-operation between police forces and courts based on a common definition of terrorism. Europol, the EU police service, needs even more energetic support from the member states.

Conversion of our hearts and minds

8. Western power, Western wealth and their symbols have provoked animosity and hate. These symbols stand in stark contrast to the misery and powerlessness of many

people, to whom the West appears hard-hearted. We are therefore convinced that in the end there can be no other path to peace than through a renewal of solidarity.

9. We propose that the EU intensifies further its co-operation with the Mediterranean rim countries in the so-called Barcelona Process. Israel must under no circumstances be excluded from this process. The endeavours to promote inter-religious dialogue in this region must be strengthened and deserve greater political support. We also urge our heads of state and government to set out a timetable and method at the European Council in Laeken in December for reaching the goal of setting aside 0.7% of gross domestic product for development assistance.
10. Our universal community of values encompasses more than material wealth and military might, the symbols of which have been attacked. It is based on shared values, which find their roots deep in the convictions of our faiths. These include the commitment, “to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom”ⁱ. For this reason, we appeal for reflection to all those who, as poets and thinkers, as artists, as writers and journalists, as researchers and theologians, bear the responsibility for producing the symbols that denote our society. Turning anew to this spiritual wealth and finding new ways to symbolise it are the most important challenges of the conversion of our hearts and minds.

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11. Countless people have turned to God in these dark days and hours in search of consolation and peace. We pray that the God of Jesus Christ, “will help all people not to give in to the temptation of hate and violence, but to commit themselves to justice and peace”ⁱⁱ.

Brussels, 17 September 2001

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Translated from the original German text

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- i NOSTRA AETATE, Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, para. 3
 - ii Pope John Paul II, 16 September 2001