



“Take this opportunity to make a stand for Just Peace”

October 2024

Over the past year, we have witnessed the tragic escalation of a severe humanitarian crisis that continues to affect countless lives. On 7 October 2023, over a thousand Israelis were killed in an attack by Hamas-led factions, and more than 250 people were taken hostage. In response, Israel launched a military operation that has resulted in significant casualties, with nearly 42,000 people losing their lives in Gaza. Both communities are enduring profound suffering, and the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip is worsening, with famine and disease leading to further loss of life. In the West Bank illegal settlements continue to expand and settler violence has dramatically increased since October 7th, creating a coercive environment that makes life impossible for Palestinian communities and forces them to leave their homes.

In January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found that there are plausible grounds to believe that Israel may be violating the Genocide Convention in Gaza. Meanwhile, the situation across the Middle East is rapidly escalating, with ongoing breaches of international law in Lebanon steadily building up towards a wider regional war. These tensions have deep roots, stemming from a conflict that began over a century ago. There is thus an urgent need for a just and lasting peace that addresses the situation in its complexity, while ensuring the needs and rights of all affected parties are respected.

As religious leaders and communities of faith, we have a vital role in preventing atrocities and advocating for sustainable peace in the Holy Land. Furthermore, it is our moral responsibility to advocate for those suffering and to condemn atrocities. We can establish a path toward lasting peace by combining grassroots efforts with international community negotiations.

Call to Action:

1. Immediate Ceasefire and Humanitarian Access

We urgently call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire to halt the ongoing violence, which continues to claim innocent lives of Palestinians, Israelis and Lebanese civilians. A ceasefire is essential to facilitate the unhindered access of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, where the situation is beyond dire. Ensuring that humanitarian organisations can reach those in need

without obstruction is critical in addressing the humanitarian crisis, respecting international humanitarian principles, and valuing human life.

2. Hostage Release and Protection of Civilians

We also call for the immediate release of all hostages as well as unlawful detainees, under the protection of international law. A ceasefire will create the necessary conditions for diplomatic efforts aimed at securing their release and ensuring that civilians are protected from further harm. Independent, neutral investigations into human rights violations and robust civilian protections are essential for building trust and preventing further escalation.

3. Addressing Root Causes of Violence

Beyond the immediate crisis, we must address the underlying causes of this ongoing suffering. The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory must end. Barriers to movement and access to essential services must be removed to allow people to meet their basic needs and rebuild their lives. The ongoing violence, including land seizures and rising fear, must be halted and met with neutral investigations and measures to ensure civilian safety. Human rights and the right to self-determination must be respected and put at the center of any political solution.

4. Respecting the Status Quo on Jerusalem's Holy Sites

We also advocate for secure access to the Holy Sites everywhere in the occupied Palestinian territory and respect for the right to worship. The unique status and character of Jerusalem and its Old City, the sanctity of its sacred spaces, and the sustainability of all its communities must be safeguarded and respected by everyone.

5. Government Action and International Law

We urge our governments to take decisive action in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Diplomatic efforts must focus on de-escalating the conflict, supporting affected communities, and ensuring that all parties respect the rules of war. Legal mechanisms like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) play a crucial role in holding perpetrators accountable and preventing future atrocities.

6. Reopen Dialogue for Lasting Peace

Reopening dialogue for a lasting peace agreement is vital. Only through sustained negotiations and a commitment to justice and accountability can we hope to address the root causes of this perpetual violence and build a future where everyone's rights are respected. In order for any peace process to be meaningful and inclusive, civil society organisations and faith communities will need to play a central role.

A Lasting Solution:

The efforts outlined above can address both the root causes and the immediate emergencies of this ongoing conflict. Implementing these measures will facilitate dialogue between the parties,

bringing an end to violence and achieving lasting peace in the Holy Land, where everyone's human rights are respected.

As faith leaders and representatives of faith communities, we believe in the power of hope and action. By standing together and advocating for justice and compassion, we can contribute to a future where peace prevails, and the dignity of every person is upheld.

Guided by the words of Saint Francis of Assisi, 'Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,' we are compelled by our faith to speak out and act in the face of suffering and injustice. We urge you to reflect these values in your decisions and actions, promoting peace, upholding human dignity, and working tirelessly for a just resolution to this conflict. Together, we can be instruments of peace, committed to healing and reconciliation for all.