

November 9, 2023

Dear President Biden:

We, the heads of churches, denominations, and church-based organizations in the United States, remain deeply grieved at the now more than month-long violence between Hamas and Israel. We condemn the brutal attacks of Hamas on October 7th that caused the loss of life of nearly 1,400 Israelis and citizens of other nations, and we call for the immediate release of all civilians held hostage. The horrific violence of Hamas does not justify further violence against Palestinian civilians.

We condemn the collective punishment imposed upon the more than 2.2 million Palestinians living in Gaza when, on October 8, the Israeli government cut off water, gas, and electricity, and all goods and supplies to the territory, putting even more pressure on a community already suffering from a humanitarian crisis more than a decade in the making. We further condemn Israel's large-scale air bombardment and ground invasion that continues to have an indiscriminate and tragically disproportionate impact on civilians. As of November 6, Israel's unrelenting military assault has killed more than 10 thousand Palestinians in Gaza, including more than four thousand children, and also included the destruction of hospitals, churches, mosques, cultural centers, and other civilian infrastructure throughout Gaza. The lives of all people, be they Israelis or Palestinians, must be protected.

Hamas' actions and the Government of Israel's response in Gaza in no way advance peace. Instead, they have caused loss of life and much harm, grief, and devastation, not only to the individuals affected but also to the legitimate cause of the Palestinian people in seeking an end to the decades-long occupation and the blockade of the Gaza Strip.

We join the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in the call for the international community to **enforce immediate protections** in Gaza for Sanctuaries of Refuge such as hospitals, schools, and houses of worship. As the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports, there are currently no safe places in Gaza, as more than 1.5 million Palestinians have been forcibly displaced from their homes and communities, many of whom are refugees already. We also stand in solidarity with the Jerusalem church leaders, sharing their real concerns, which predate the events of the past month, about the sustainability of Christianity and all faith traditions in the Holy Land.

Strong leadership from the United States is needed at this moment. We call on you, President Biden, and your Administration to support an **immediate ceasefire, de-escalation, and**

**restraint by all involved.** We have made the same requests to Congress. All efforts, including bilateral and multilateral ones, must be made for this war to be brought to a swift end.

We implore your administration not to ignore the growing **catastrophic humanitarian crisis** in Gaza and to demand immediate and adequate access to and provision of humanitarian needs. Much more food, water, medicine, electricity, and fuel supplies than are currently provided must reach all the people of Gaza now.

We further support the **demilitarization of the conflict** rather than supplying additional military aid or arms to Israel at this time. The US already sends \$3.8 billion per year in military assistance to Israel, for which, effectively, the U.S. has not imposed consequences for its gross violations of human rights as required in U.S. laws. Additional military aid will only prolong Israel's offensive, will lead to more Palestinian civilian deaths, and will not likely be subject to any accountability. Please do everything possible to demilitarize the conflict and call for a ceasefire.

We call on you to press all parties to **abide by the Geneva Conventions and customary international law** and for the collective punishment imposed upon the civilians in Gaza to be brought to an end. Atrocities against civilians are never justified. We call for actions to be taken to secure the **immediate release of all civilians being held hostage** and ensure **international protection for all civilians**.

As you focus on Gaza, we also urge your administration to do all it can to **ensure the accountability of settlers** in the West Bank who are using this opportunity to attack Palestinians and illegally confiscate even more Palestinian land through violent means. Numerous Palestinians in the West Bank have been shot since October 7 with weapons issued by the Israeli government.

We urge you to recognize that the **root causes of suffering** must be addressed so that, when this current crisis is over, we do not witness a return to an unsustainable status quo. It is not enough to stop the current fighting.

**Peace with justice** is the only lasting solution that will protect the long-term security and sustainability of the State of Israel and the self-determination and independence of Palestinians. The United States must demonstrate its commitment to the protection of all human life, advocating for a just and durable resolution to this crisis in which all Israelis and Palestinians might realize a vision of a just peace, illuminating human dignity, advancing security and self-determination for all.

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