

May 20, 2021

United Nations Headquarters
New York, NY 10017

Dear Members of the United Nations Security Council:

We write to you as church leaders from Europe and North America with deep ties to the Holy Land and a strong commitment to work toward a just and lasting end to the conflict in Israel-Palestine. The increased violence of the past weeks and the loss of Israeli and Palestinian lives could, and should, have been avoided. During the holy month of Ramadan, over 200 Muslims were injured when Israeli police forces deployed rubber bullets, stun grenades, and tear gas canisters inside the third most important Holy place for Muslims. Respect for, and guaranteed access to, all holy sites particularly, but not only in Jerusalem, is an essential precursor to a return to calm. We condemn all attacks against civilians —including Israel’s bombing of Gaza and rocket fire from Hamas -- as a violation of international humanitarian law.

Every effort to secure an immediate ceasefire, including direct pressure from international governments and multilateral bodies, must be pursued. Every hour without a ceasefire leads to more suffering and civilian deaths as of May 19, at least 227 Palestinians in Gaza, including 64 children, and 12 Israelis, including 2 children have died. We call on members of the Security Council, including the United States and the other permanent members, to put aside differences and call for an immediate ceasefire.

Extreme violence will remain a constant threat until and unless the root causes of the conflict are properly addressed. In Jerusalem, a city of sacred importance to Christian, Jews, and Muslims, the current unrest is linked directly to the ongoing military occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel, and efforts to remove Palestinians residents from their homes.

In the occupied East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, several families face imminent forced expulsion from the homes they have lived in for decades, to make way for Israeli settlers. Over the past several decades we have seen a significant increase in de facto annexation, with Palestinians expelled from their homes throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, to make way for expanded illegal Israeli settlements. The daily humiliations of occupation are reinforced by restrictions on movements, evictions and demolitions. For violence to end permanently Israel’s occupation must also end.

We urge the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), to act immediately to address the continuing underlying causes of injustice that will otherwise remain a constant threat to peace in the Holy Land: occupation, land dispossession, displacement, and the withholding of basic human rights we take for granted. What is required is not a temporary ceasefire, but a permanent and lasting solution that will guarantee equality and human rights for all.

Signed:

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