



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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July 20, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

Last Sunday, Pope Francis spoke to the terrible cycle of violence in the Holy Land. The Pope pleaded with political leaders “not to spare prayer or any effort to end every hostility and seek the desired peace for the good of all.” Despite this plea, the hostilities between Israel and Hamas have only intensified, bringing death and destruction, especially to the civilian population of Gaza. Catholic Relief Services has had to suspend operations in Gaza due to the violence, but with U.S. support, is prepared to resume humanitarian and development assistance to Gaza’s vulnerable population when a ceasefire is achieved.

Israelis should not have to live in fear of Hamas’ indiscriminate rocket attacks on civilian areas. At the same time, Palestinians should not have to live in fear for their lives from air and ground attacks or to suffer the humiliations of occupation.

This latest bonfire of violence was ignited by the tragic kidnappings and murders of three Israeli youth, the arrests of hundreds of Palestinians and the searches of hundreds of Palestinian homes in the West Bank, and the consequent kidnapping and murder of a Palestinian youth who was burned alive. These tragic actions and reactions should have warned us that the status quo is unsustainable. It is a recipe for recurring violence.

Indeed, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries in the Holy Land has declared that all of these killings “are products of the injustice and of the hatred that the occupation fosters in the hearts of those prone to such deeds. These deaths are in no way justifiable and we mourn with those who mourn the waste of these young lives.”

In addition to seeking an immediate ceasefire and humanitarian relief for the people of Gaza, I urge you to reengage in the difficult, but essential, work of building a just and lasting peace. Only the emergence of a viable and independent Palestinian state living alongside a recognized and secure Israel will bring the peace for which majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians yearn.

It is my hope and prayer that one day we might look back and find that this latest cycle of violence was the last—a cycle broken by a just and lasting peace agreement. May we be one with Pope Francis and the world community “not to spare prayer or any effort to end every hostility and seek the desired peace for the good of all.”

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
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