



Statement on Israeli-Palestinian Violence

Administrative Committee

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

March 13, 2002

The horrible cycle of violence, occupation, and terror in the Middle East must be brought to an end. Every day, more Palestinians and Israelis lose their lives, and every day, many more are losing their hopes for a future of dignity, security and peace.

We call on Catholics in this nation to join with us in fervent prayer and greater advocacy for a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians. As citizens, we urge our government to use every means to persuade leaders on both sides to turn away from actions which permit, incite or employ violence and to return to the search for peace based on mutual respect and equal justice for Palestinians and Israelis. Nothing is gained by demonizing one side or the other in this conflict. The human and moral imperative now is for a just peace based on understanding, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

It is clearer now than ever before that the status quo is unacceptable. Israeli occupation cannot be sustained – militarily or morally – nor can the indiscriminate use of force in civilian areas. Palestinian attacks on innocent civilians cannot be tolerated – both because they are morally indefensible and because they undermine the legitimate claims of the Palestinian people. This deadly cycle of action and reaction, suicide bombing, and aggressive attacks must be ended.

As we said in our statement last June, sustained U.S. leadership, in cooperation with others in the international community, is required to encourage, persuade and insist that both parties take the steps necessary to end the violence, rapidly resolve the differences between them and begin to live in peace together. We must make clear that attacks on civilians must end, whether they are carried out in shopping malls by suicide bombers or in refugee camps by military units. We must insist that the parties embrace an immediate cease-fire and return to the arduous task of negotiating a just peace, without delay or pre-conditions. Only negotiation can lead to an end to violence and occupation, a secure state for Israel and a viable state for Palestinians.

We hope the return to the region of General Anthony Zinni, the encouraging proposals from Saudi Arabia, and elements of the Mitchell and Tenet reports can provide the basis for new and urgent diplomatic efforts to replace bloody conflict with serious dialogue based in respect for relevant UN resolutions, such as that just approved by the Security Council, and other provisions of international law. Real peace and security will not come from terror or tanks, but only from a determination to find the ways for both Israelis and Palestinians to live together with dignity, justice and peace.

We stand with the Church in the Holy Land, which has not escaped the violence, as evidenced by the damage inflicted on Bethlehem University, St. Joseph's School, the Creche maternity clinic and other church institutions. We join with leaders of the Christian community in the Holy Land in their haunting question: "Is this the future that we all want for our children?" We share their conviction that "the key to a just peace is in the hands of both the Israeli Government and the

Palestinian Authority. War, shelling, and destruction will not bring justice and security; rather, it will intensify hatred and bitterness.” We share their belief “that Israeli and Palestinian peoples are called to be partners in an historic peace.”

Speaking out of the tragic circumstances of this ongoing conflict, the Christian leaders of the Holy Land have said: “Our prayers for peace are more urgently needed than ever.” May Catholics throughout this nation join us in imploring God for justice, peace and reconciliation in the land we call “holy.”

May we heed the words of the Psalmist: “I will hear what God proclaims; for He proclaims peace to his people, and to his faithful ones, and to those who put in Him their hope” (Ps 85, 9).

Note: General Anthony Zinni, the U.S. special envoy, is on a peace mission that, among other things, seeks to encourage the parties to implement a truce negotiated last June by CIA Director George Tenet and to implement detailed proposals for a return to negotiations issued last May by an international commission headed by George Mitchell. The Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah has recently called for a peace settlement based on the establishment of a Palestinian State in the territories now occupied by Israel and normalization of relations between Arab governments and Israel.



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