



ACTION ALERT ON MIDDLE EAST CRISIS:



Request U.S. Leadership to Achieve an Immediate Ceasefire, Deliver Humanitarian Aid and Seek Political Solutions

August 1, 2006

BACKGROUND: The current cycle of violence in the Middle East was immediately precipitated by provocative acts by Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, including cross-border attacks and abductions against Israeli military personnel and rocket attacks against Israeli civilians. Israel has a right to defend its citizens, but its military response has been disproportionate and indiscriminate in some instances, endangering Palestinian and Lebanese civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure. The tragic deaths of civilians, many of whom were children, in Qana, Lebanon, is a recent reminder of civilian vulnerability. Catholic Relief Services staff are on the ground providing humanitarian aid in both Gaza and Lebanon.

USCCB POSITION: The Holy Father, the Holy See, the USCCB Committee on International Policy and the local Church in the Holy Land have spoken out on the human and moral dimensions of the continuing crisis in the Middle East.

In a letter to all members of Congress, Bishop Thomas Wenski, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on International Policy, called on the United States to exercise greater leadership. Bishop Wenski urged the U.S. to work to: end the current cycle of violence, condemn all attacks on civilians, secure an effective and immediate ceasefire, open humanitarian corridors, oppose disproportionate and indiscriminate actions, and move toward negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians to advance a two-state solution, and ensure the independence of Lebanon.

ACTION REQUESTED:

1. Call the *White House* comment line at 202-456-1111. Emphasize these points:
 - Ask the President to support an immediate ceasefire.
 - Acknowledge the right of Israel to protect its people and territory.
 - Express deep concern for civilians caught up in the conflict on all sides.
 - Urge U.S. action to secure humanitarian corridors and deliver humanitarian aid.
 - Urge negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians and measures to ensure the independence of Lebanon.
2. In home district *Congressional visits* during the August recess, use the additional talking points below.

ADDITIONAL TALKING POINTS: The following talking points are drawn from and reflect the substance of these key Church statements and letters by Church leaders:

- The horrific cycle of violence in the Middle East is destroying the lives of innocent people on all sides of the conflict as well as the hopes for the necessary negotiations and accommodations that could lead to a just peace that offers genuine security to Israelis, a viable state for Palestinians and real independence for the Lebanese people. The Catholic community is deeply and urgently concerned about the human costs, the moral implications and future consequences of these unfolding events.
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops condemns the terror and provocative acts of Hamas and Hezbollah that precipitated the crises, including cross-border attacks, abductions and the continuing indefensible rocket and missile attacks on innocent Israeli citizens, both Jews and Arabs. These radical armed groups (and their supporters in Syria and Iran) bear the responsibility for initiating the current cycle of violence.
- Israel clearly has a right to defend itself, but as Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano said, Israel's right to self-defense "does not exempt it from respecting the norms of international law, especially as regards the protection of civilian populations." Israel's response has been in some instances militarily disproportionate and indiscriminate. In light of traditional Catholic teaching, massive counterattacks on civilian areas and infrastructure, blockades and other acts of war should not be supported. Punishment of entire peoples for the indefensible acts of militant armed factions contradicts traditional just war norms. Indiscriminate attacks on innocent people can not be justified. There are deepening humanitarian crises in Gaza and Lebanon.
- Only genuine dialogue and negotiations can bring a lasting and just peace to the region. As Bishop Wenski stated in his appeal to political leaders, it is "clear that violence, from whatever side, for whatever purpose, cannot bring a lasting or just peace in the Land we call Holy." The recurrent cycle of terrorist attacks, deliberate provocations and disproportionate military responses undermines brave and wise people on all sides who seek a just, two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Regarding Lebanon, the rocket attacks and the bombings of innocent civilians are morally indefensible. Unjustifiable and indiscriminate attacks and excessive military responses endanger innocent lives and undermine Lebanon's struggle to free itself from outside domination and from serving as a bloody pawn in the broader Middle East conflict.
- The United States must exercise greater leadership to end the current cycle of violence, condemn all attacks on civilians, secure an effective and immediate ceasefire, open humanitarian corridors, oppose disproportionate and indiscriminate actions, move toward negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians to advance a two state solution, and ensure the independence of Lebanon.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Visit this website for recent USCCB and Church leaders' statements: <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/mideastind.htm#general>.

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