



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/SDWP

July 20, 2006

Dear Senator:

Dear Representative:

The horrific cycle of violence in the Middle East is destroying the lives of innocent people on all sides of the conflict. It is also destroying the hopes for 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. As you deliberate about policies and actions to address the conflict, I wish to call to your attention the recent statements of Pope Benedict XVI, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and the leaders of Christian communities of the Holy Land regarding the situation. (See: web site address: <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/mideastind.htm#general>)

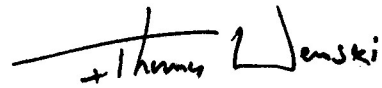
Here is a summary of the statement by Bishop Thomas G. Wenski, Chair, Committee on International Policy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

- 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 Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Vatican Secretary of State, 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. A humanitarian crisis is growing 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 the 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 once again 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, and move toward negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians to advance a two state solution, and ensure the independence of Lebanon.

We hope and pray that you will do all that you can to end this terrible cycle of violence and to protect the lives and dignity of Israelis, Palestinians and Lebanese. We stand ready to work with those who work for a just and lasting peace in the Land that three faiths call Holy.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Policy