

Embargo: Thursday, 23 January 2025, 11am (Jerusalem, GMT+2)

## **Final Communique of the Holy Land Co-ordination 18-23 January 2025**

*'A lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.'* 2 Peter 1:19

We came to the Holy Land, this Jubilee Year, as pilgrims of hope. We came in hope that a fragile ceasefire agreement, announced as we travelled here, would hold.

We came looking forward to those, in both Israel and Palestine, who have suffered the atrocities of violence and war, being able to rebuild their shattered lives, to mourn the loss of their loved ones, to come together again as families and to start on the long, uncertain road to recovery.

Joy at the return of Israeli hostages and the release of Palestinian prisoners is marred by the knowledge that so many will not return: hostages, prisoners, countless dead. We note widespread concern at the fragility of the ceasefire; that it may bring respite but not the sustained and lasting peace for which the Holy Land cries out. An online meeting with the parish priest of Holy Family Parish in Gaza impressed upon us the devastation being experienced by the whole population.

The impact of war on the whole West Bank is rarely reported at home. We have been privileged to listen first-hand to several communities of Christians in the West Bank. To them we wish to say:

“Thank you for the most generous welcome you extended towards us; for helping us understand the extraordinary efforts being made in the fields of healthcare and education to preserve the dignity of all those living in the West Bank. Your communities are a light in the darkness of a suffering Land. We were moved to hear how often Christians expressed their commitment to stay and rebuild the lives of their people.

“Thank you, as well, for sharing all the struggles you experience: the severe restriction on movement; the sudden road closures which add hours to short journeys and so inhibit normal daily life but most especially urgent medical assistance; the lack of water and electricity; the impossibility of constructing new buildings; the high level of unemployment after so many work permits were cancelled with the start of war. We recognised the need for the respective governments to work together to resolve these vital issues.

“We saw how settlements, illegal under international law, which were once enclaves have grown to surround you to make enclaves now of your communities. We hear your cry for peace with justice and your anxiety at what will happen when the focus turns away from Gaza; what will happen to your land. There is a clear need for the international community to act together to facilitate realistic and radical development assistance, as part of a process towards achieving a lasting peace.

“We came to tell you that you are not alone; that you are not forgotten. Your faith and resilience strengthen our own faith. We hope that our coming among you encourages you and will inspire Christians from our different countries to return to the Holy Land on pilgrimage. We hope that pilgrims will journey not only to the Holy Sites of Jerusalem, Galilee and Bethlehem, but that they will also come to visit communities like Aboud, Ephraim-Taybeh, and Ramallah so they too can draw inspiration from your faithfulness to the Land in which Jesus was born.”

We join with Patriarch Pizzaballa and the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land in their hope that the ceasefire amounts to more than a pause in hostilities and marks the start of a genuine and lasting peace. We share their conviction that this can only be achieved “through a just solution that addresses the origin of this long-standing struggle; (that it will require) a long process, a willingness to acknowledge each other’s suffering and a focused education in trust that leads to overcoming fear of the other and the justification of violence as a political tool.<sup>1</sup>”

**Right Revd Nicholas Hudson**

*Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster*

England and Wales

Moderator of the Holy Land Coordination

**Most Revd Udo Bentz**

*Archbishop of Paderborn*

Germany

**Right Revd Pierre Burcher**

*Bishop Emeritus of Reykjavik*

Nordic Bishops' Conference

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden

**Right Revd Christopher Chessun**

*Anglican Bishop of Southwark*

Church of England

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lpj.org/en/news/declaration-of-the-catholic-ordinaries-on-the-ceasefire-ingaza2025>

**Right Revd James Curry**

*Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster*

England and Wales

**Most Revd William Nolan**

*Archbishop of Glasgow*

Scotland

**Most Revd Joan Enric Vives Sicilia**

*Bishop of Urgell*

Spain

Principality of Andorra

**Right Revd Elias Zaidan**

*Bishop of the Maronite Eparchy*

United States of America