

His Excellency Javier Solana
Secretary General
Council of the European Union
High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy
15 rue de l' Association
1000 Brussels

Brussels, 7 January 2009

Ref: Violence in Gaza

Your Excellency,

Pax Christi International is a faith-based network working for peace and justice uniting over hundred non-governmental organizations around the world, including several member organizations in the Middle East. We are deeply concerned about the recent escalation of violence in the region. In this regard:

We join the manifold calls worldwide for an immediate ceasefire and urge that the violence on both sides is strongly condemned in the most unambiguous terms, without the use of double standards or manipulation of the truth. It should be made very clear to all parties involved that the use of violence will not bring justice, peace or any lasting security to the people in the region, but will only increase fear, hatred and suffering. In the framework of its cooperation, the EU leadership should make it clear to Israel that its choice for massive violence leads them on a path of self-destruction in an increasingly hostile world.

We support the most decisive action to uphold international humanitarian law, which should be the basic framework for a solution to the conflict in Israel-Palestine. The Palestinian rocket attacks against Israeli civilians constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian law and must stop, but nothing can justify the unconscionable and disproportionate Israeli military actions in Gaza. As a member of the United Nations, Israel is bound by the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect the civilian population under its occupation. Instead, the whole population in Gaza is being punished collectively for the actions of a few militants. The projection of massive military force in one of the most densely populated areas in the world has claimed hundreds of victims, a high percentage of them civilians, including women and children. We call upon the international community to act resolutely against these violations of international law.

We also support the initiatives of the European Union to do all that is possible to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which is quickly becoming catastrophic due to the long blockade, the high population density and the scarcity already of water, food, electricity and medicines. We are sure that the EU, as the leading aid donor to Palestine for years, has the capacity to urge Israel to cooperate fully to ease the dramatic humanitarian situation in Gaza.

We urge consistent attention by the European Union to the roots of the conflict, including the occupation and the ensuing social-economic de-development in the occupied territories, the blockade of Gaza and the sense of insecurity and fear on the Israeli side. Providing palliatives for the latest escalation is not enough.

Although the crisis itself requires immediate local attention, we also would like to emphasize the need for a regional approach. The current violence could set the region aflame; therefore, efforts toward sustainable peacebuilding should include the whole region. The current disproportionate violence undermines not only the fragile peace process between Israel and Palestine but also, for example, efforts to improve the relationship between Israel and Syria. Therefore, we urge a serious exploration of regional approaches to peace, such as the recently proposed Arab Peace Plan. We also support a proactive engagement with radical and extremist groups, without whose involvement even the best peace plans can not flourish, and serious efforts to stem the tide of rising Islamophobia, Christianophobia and anti-Semitism, as increasingly played out in the streets of Europe too.

Many individuals and groups in Israel, Palestine and the region, among them Pax Christi partners, offer an alternative of active nonviolence, cooperation and understanding. In local communities they are building positive relationships across great differences and are effectively preventing further radicalization in society. They deserve to be heard and supported.

In conclusion, we support strong EU leadership to hold all parties to account in order to move toward a two-state solution—a secure Israel living in peace with a viable Palestinian state—with justice and peace for both peoples.

We thank you for all your efforts towards this goal.

Yours sincerely,

Msgr. Laurent Monsengwo
Co-President Pax Christi International

Marie Dennis
Co- President Pax Christi International

Claudette Werleigh
Secretary General Pax Christi International