



## Reflections from the Holy Land A very sad Christmas!

The last 74 days since 7 October 2023 have been the most difficult period in the recent history of the Holy Land. According to the UN-OCHA reports 18,800 people have been killed in Gaza of whom 70% are children and women; 51,000 people injured; over 60% of Gaza's housing units are either destroyed or damaged; 1.9 million out of the 2.3 million people in Gaza are internally displaced; only 8 of the 36 hospitals are functioning; 136 UN relief workers killed as well as 300 health workers and 89 journalists. Food, water, and medicine deliveries are a mere 20% of what Gaza needs on a daily basis causing hunger and spread of diseases. Electricity, water, and sewage networks are completely destroyed! Gaza is becoming very quickly uninhabitable. On the West Bank the situation is extremely difficult characterized by massive loss of employment or income due to the suspension of most permits to work in Israel; complete collapse of the tourism sector; and the lack of financial resources for the Palestinian Authority to pay salaries to its 180,000 civil servants. Daily incursions by the Israeli army have resulted in 278 Palestinians killed including 70 children; and 344 Israeli settler attacks deeming roads dangerous let alone the closure and fragmentation by the Israeli army. Unbearable living conditions to say the least!



Our brothers and sisters in Gaza continue to live in very harsh and dangerous conditions. For the 600 people who have taken refuge at the Holy Family Church complex since the beginning of the war, they have been witnessing a serious and steady deterioration in their daily living conditions. Fuel ran out a few days ago and food, water, and medicines are in very short supply which will run out within days if no new supplies are delivered. The security situation has deteriorated dramatically in recent days. It started with hitting the solar panels and the water tanks on the roof, followed by a direct hit on the laundry room of the Daughters of Charity home for disabled children. On Saturday, the most serious escalation took place when a missile hit the electric generator and fuel tank adjacent to the children's home causing a major fire and explosion resulting in the collapse of the whole façade of the building with the ferocious fire



damaging part of the building deeming it uninhabitable and putting the children at risk. A few hours later an Israeli army sniper killed two ladies Nahida Anton and daughter Samar Anton as the older lady was making her way across the church courtyard. Her children and grandchildren as well as a doctor on site rushed to help, but they themselves were also targets resulting in seven injuries, some requiring hospitalization which so far has not existed. The funeral was held yesterday in the Church compound and the bodies were buried in the adjacent cemetery inside the Church complex. We all continue to mourn the loss of innocent life. With this, a total of 2.5% of the Christian population of Gaza have already died due to hostilities since the beginning of the war which is catastrophic by any standard! We all thought Churches are protected and safe havens, but that does not seem to apply to Gaza!



Amidst all this misery, the heads of churches in Jerusalem announced that the Christmas celebrations this year will be restricted to the religious ceremonies inside churches and all tree lighting events and public displays are cancelled as a sign of respect and in mourning to those who lost their lives. Even the traditional entry to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve by His Beatitude Cardinal Pizzaballa will follow the traditional status quo but will be void of the public celebrations. A skeletal scout troupes will be present but no marching bands. It will be indeed a very sad Christmas.



As people of deep faith and hope, we wish to extend our best wishes for the Christmas season and pray that 2024 will bring better times to our wounded and bleeding Holy Land. Thank you for all your support and please keep praying for your suffering brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, especially for an immediate ceasefire to save further destruction and loss of innocent human lives. Let us hope that the Christian message of forgiveness, coexistence, respect, and love will be stronger than the messages of destruction, hate, killing, and revenge prevalent on the streets so that this decades old conflict will come to a conclusion and peace and justice will prevail. Please keep praying for us as we shall keep praying for all of you. Merry Christmas to you, your colleagues, and loved ones from all of us in the Holy Land.

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