# The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) Calls for Immediate Cessation of Hostilities in Gaza

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***“In the day of my trouble I call on you”*** *— Psalm 86:7*

Witnessing the bombardments, hearing the sirens, listening to the cries of mothers and children, seeing the ambulances carrying the wounded and people living in absolute fear, the ELCJHL cries out to God. We also raise our voice to all Christian sisters and brothers, along with all people of goodwill, to end this latest round of violence between the State of Israel and the Palestinian people.

In these days, many of us are quite depressed and frustrated, left wondering where this country is headed, along with much of the Middle East. As a church that has always strongly condemned violence as a means of solving conflicts, we were deeply troubled by the kidnapping and murder of the three Israeli teenagers and the kidnapping and burning alive of the Palestinian teenager. We strongly condemn both of these actions as inhumane and despicable acts.

As we condemn the kidnappings, we also unequivocally condemn in the strongest terms possible the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas against civilian targets and the ongoing Israeli blockade and bombardment of Gaza (resulting so far in the deaths of more than 200 people, 80 percent of whom were civilians and 20 percent children). Both expressions of violence are flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights laws and should be immediately ended.

This country and its people have gone through 65 years of violence, retaliations, and counter-retaliations. The ELCJHL believes that the existing political deadlock between Israel and Palestine cannot be resolved militarily. The current hostilities do not serve the long-term interest of any party. We have always believed in non-violent struggle and creative resistance to illegal state policies. Throughout our history we have worked to alleviate human suffering, promote peace and reconciliation.

We are afraid that this current wave of violence may force more Palestinian Christians to seek immigration. And what is the Holy Land without its Christians? To Palestinian Christians here in this land, I call upon you to remain, continuing your service as instruments of peace, brokers of justice, bridge builders, and agents of change.

In reaffirmation of our position, we call for:

* Parties to the present conflict (Israel and Hamas) to agree upon an immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities. This ceasefire should be facilitated by the international community to bring an end to human suffering. The focus of the international community should be on humanitarian and development assistance for the communities most negatively affected by the current round of violence. What Palestine and Israel need at the moment is justice, peace and dignity rather than the radicalization, revenge, and bloodshed promoted by one-sided diplomatic or military support for either group. The people of Palestine and Israel need to live in peace and dignity.
* The resumption of direct peace talks to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable peace and a two-state solution based on 1967 borders and abide by international human rights and humanitarian law. The unity government of the Palestinian Authority should be respected. Any ceasefire addressing the immediate situation should be anchored in a long-term peace agreement in order to prevent other relapses into violence.
* The lifting of the Israeli siege on Gaza. This indefinite siege on Gaza has created great suffering and instigated greater hostility. If a sustainable peace is to be achieved, Israel should lift its blockade. The unified Palestinian people of Gaza and the West Bank should enjoy their right to freedom of movement.
* Critical support for healthcare infrastructure. The international community has long supported healthcare services for Palestinians, especially in the West Bank and Gaza. The present violence has severely affected healthcare infrastructure. We especially raise our concern for the financial crisis faced by Augusta Victoria Hospital and the system of East Jerusalem hospitals and medical centers.
* Material support for interreligious cooperation and peacebuilding through the educational and diaconal ministries of the ELCJHL. These ministries empower the forces of moderation to build up civil society and create a shared future. Recurring cycles of violence place the church and related agencies in a chronic state of crisis and emergency, making it difficult for local institutions to thrive.
* That the global Christian community—including the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation—provide necessary assistance to those who have been internally displaced or affected by the current wave of violence in one form or another and to help the economic and development growth of the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land raises its voice to ask all people of good will to intervene in the present situation of unacceptable violence and bloodshed. Your intervention and action will create hope in a hopeless situation. If we cannot take steps toward peace, we will continue to be held hostage by extremism. Please do not leave us alone in this moment of struggle. The whole Middle East is boiling. We need your prophetic voice and support so that peace built on justice and reconciliation built on forgiveness will prevail.

**Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan**Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

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| |  | | --- | | Faith Communities Forced to Flee in Northern Iraq LWF Condemns Extremist Actions; Explores Ways to Stand with Internally Displaced in the Region **MOSUL, Northern Iraq/GENEVA, 29 July 2014 (LWI)** – Lutheran World Federation (LWF) General Secretary Rev. Martin Junge has strongly condemned the discrimination against Christians, Shiites and other religious and ethnic minorities in Northern Iraq by the Sunni Muslim militant group, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS).  Thousands of Christians are fleeing Northern Iraq and communities they have lived in for almost 2,000 years following ISIS' ultimatum last week that they convert to Islam, pay a tax, or be killed for their faith.  Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city, had 60,000 Christians at the time of the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, and the Christian population still numbered 35,000 in June.  Mosul is the birthplace of Assyrian Christianity, one of the most ancient Christian communities. Other faith communities are also targeted and have been forced to flee.  “What we see in Northern Iraq is an outrageous development. It pains us to hear about the suffering of people whose basic rights are being taken away. People who have a right not to be discriminated because of their faith, and who in fact have been living peacefully side by side for generations with people of other faiths – many of them forced to flee as well,” Junge said.  ISIS, which has taken control of Mosul and much of the surrounding region, has declared the establishment of an "Islamic state" or “Caliphate” on the territory of Iraq and Syria, where they have also been active. Many Christians, Shiites, Yezedians (Zoroastrians), and Kurdish ethnicity communities have fled to the Kurdish-controlled section of the Nineveh plain to the east and north of the Mosul region, and further on into the Kurdish Region, where there are already more than 200,000 Syrian refugees as a result of the conflict in Syria.  “As the LWF, we are additionally pained because the majority of those affected are our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. We abhor the fact that, because of extremist views, invoking the name of religion, Christians, as well as other faith communities in minority situations, are affected by these extremist views,” Junge said.  Church organizations in Mosul, whom the LWF has spoken to, report that ISIS militants have seized all churches and monasteries in the city, many of which have been burnt, looted, destroyed or converted into mosques. ISIS has also destroyed at least 24 shrines in Mosul, including a mosque that contained a shrine believed to be the tomb of Jonah – who is revered by Christians as well as Muslims and Jews.  The LWF is looking into ways to stand with the displaced and affected people in Northern Iraq. In the past few days, ISIS has cut off water supplies from central pumping plants on the Tigris in Mosul to the Kurdish controlled areas of the Nineveh plain.  Together with its partners in the ACT Alliance, the LWF is appealing for funds to ensure clean, emergency water supplies for 12,500 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their host communities, and to guarantee an additional two-months’ food security for 2,500 IDP families. The LWF is also seeking to offer psycho-social services to 5,000 vulnerable individuals, who have experienced psychological and physical trauma.  While many of the initially displaced population of Sunni Arab ethnicity have returned to their homes in the Mosul area, displaced minority groups of Shiite, Christian, Yezedians and Kurdish ethnicity remain fearful for their future under ISIS, and seem most likely to remain in the Iraqi Kurdish Region or the area of the Nineveh plain for the medium term. | |