

Feb 13, 2024

Dear President Biden:

We, the heads of churches, denominations, and church-based organizations in the United States, write with utmost urgency after over 100 days of violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Too many people have suffered. Too many lives have been lost. **We urge you to exhibit strong U.S. leadership and immediately call for a comprehensive permanent ceasefire, an end to the occupation, and lasting peace.**

The time for a comprehensive ceasefire is now. Every day of continued violence not only increases the death toll in Gaza and the cost to civilians but also fosters further hatred toward Israel and the United States and irreparably damages the moral standing of the United States in the broader Middle East. There is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We welcome the recent Order of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to hold Israel accountable for its actions and **[“to take all measures within its power”](#)** to prevent genocide, in addition to reporting the steps it is taking to uphold its responsibility and ensure humanitarian aid is reaching the people of Gaza. Instead of claiming the merits of the case are unfounded, we call on your administration to honor its legal obligations as a signatory of the Convention on the Prevention of Genocide and to take steps to enforce the ICJ’s Order immediately.

To date, Israel’s ongoing bombardment of Gaza has killed more than 27,000 Palestinians, including more than [10,000 of whom are children](#), and the number continues to increase. We call on all parties to abide by the Geneva Conventions and customary international law and for the collective punishment imposed upon the civilians in Gaza to be brought to an immediate end. The United States must do more to ensure international protection for all civilians and help secure the immediate release of all hostages.

The ongoing severity of the death and destruction that continues day by day at the hands of the Israeli military is unacceptable. According to the [Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor](#), more than 24,000 children in Gaza have lost one or both parents. Save the Children [reports](#) that 75 percent of schools, colleges, and universities in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged. UNICEF implores the world to respond, as 90 percent of children under two years old in Gaza are subject to [“severe food poverty.”](#) The United States must intervene by bringing an end to this war rather than sending more arms that only cause further death and destruction.

Every day that this violence continues, the risk of further escalation in the region continues, making Palestinians, Israelis, and everyone in the Middle East less safe. We condemn the attack that killed three American service members on January 28 and urge the U.S. and all parties to de-escalate instead of taking retaliatory actions that would beget more violence and risk further escalation. More war and violence is not the answer and would only put all people in the region at further risk.

Amid the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, we are also alarmed that many donor states, including the U.S., have suspended funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). UNRWA is the primary international organization providing lifesaving aid for millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the region, and we are appalled by the impact of the suspensions. We affirm the efforts of the United Nations to investigate the allegations against the UNRWA staff who were allegedly implicated in terrorist activities and call for accountability measures. **There is no other existing organization or mechanism that can provide the wide-scale humanitarian assistance urgently needed at this moment.**

We note the [comments](#) of NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby that the alleged actions of some of the staff of UNRWA “does not, nor should it, impugn the entire agency and the entire — all the body of work that they’re doing. They have helped save literally thousands of lives in Gaza. They do important work.” **We call upon your administration to immediately resume full funding to UNRWA and encourage other donor states to follow suit.** The United States government must do more to ensure the immediate and consistent provision of humanitarian assistance.

As leaders of church organizations committed to peace, we call on your administration and Congress to support the **demilitarization of the conflict** rather than supplying additional military aid or arms to Israel. Continued military aid will only exacerbate the current violence and result in more suffering without bringing increased safety to Israelis or to anyone in the region.

We agree with your administration’s stated commitment to **ensuring Palestinians in Gaza can remain**, and those who have fled must be able to return to their homes and communities once it is safe to do so. We recognize, too, that many homes and neighborhoods have been destroyed beyond repair. We call for **robust support and prompt reconstruction** so that people may have dignified shelter. We affirm the United States’ opposition to calls by Israeli officials to illegally resettle Gaza with its citizens. And we support your administration’s efforts in working toward an **immediate release of hostages held in Gaza in exchange for political prisoners.**

Israelis and Palestinians can no longer continue these ongoing cycles of war and violence. **Mr. President, now is the time for you to support a permanent bilateral ceasefire that will bring a lasting end to the violence.** The root causes of violence and suffering must be addressed, and we call upon all parties to work toward a lasting, just peace that protects all human life and ensures the long-term security and sustainability of all those living in the Middle East.

Sincerely,

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