

**STOP THE VIOLENCE, START BUILDING PEACE:**

**COMMUNIQUE OF THE COORDINATION OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES IN  
SUPPORT OF THE CHURCH IN THE HOLY LAND**

**January 15, 2009 Bethlehem - Jerusalem**

Stop the violence! Stop the killing! Start to build peace!

Over and over again we heard these cries during the ninth visit of the Coordination of Episcopal Conferences\* to the Mother Church of Jerusalem in this divided and suffering land. The violence in Gaza was on everyone's minds and lips. We heard directly about the human tragedy from the parish priest of Gaza, Father Manawel Musallam.

There can be no peace unless people believe in peace. There can be no security unless there is security for all. There can be no justice unless there is justice for everyone in this land. Faith gives us hope that justice, peace and forgiveness are possible—a conviction shared by our hosts, His Beatitude Fouad Twal and the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land.

We are pastors, not political leaders, but the religious voice is vital to the search for peace. The reality that every human person is created in the image of God demands dignity for all. The message of the Prince of Peace, born in this land, reminds us that peace is possible. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:2) The darkness of this time will give way to light.

To the leaders of the international community we say: Work with Israelis and Palestinians to stop the violence in Gaza and provide urgently needed humanitarian assistance. But do not stop there. With one voice press Israelis and Palestinians to build a just peace with security for Israel and a viable state for Palestinians.

To the people of God in our countries we say: Intensify your prayer for the welfare of the Mother Church and the peace of Jerusalem. Do not be afraid. Come as pilgrims to the Holy Land and meet with the living Christian communities here. Join us in persuading our governments to make Israeli-Palestinian peace a high priority. Support concrete projects and partnerships with the local Christian communities that are struggling for survival.

To the Christians of the Mother Church in the Holy Land we say: We see in you the suffering face of Christ who lost everything for our sake. You are not alone. We are one family, a worldwide communion in Christ. We hear your cries as you suffer alongside your brothers and sisters in the wider community. We assure you of our love, our prayer and our continued solidarity. We ask you to pray for us.

Signatories:

Bishop Peter Bürcher  
Bishop of Reykjavik, Scandinavian Bishops' Conference

Bishop Michel Dubost  
Bishop of Evry, French Bishops' Conference

Bishop Raymond Field  
Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin, Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs, Irish Bishops' Conference

Archbishop Patrick Kelly  
Archbishop of Liverpool, Vice-President of Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales

Bishop William Kenney CP  
Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham, Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales  
Representative of the Commission of Episcopal Conferences of the European Union

Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas  
Bishop of Tucson, Vice President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Archbishop Reinhard Marx  
Archbishop of Munich and Freising, Vice President, Commission of International Church Affairs,  
Bishops' Conference of Germany

Bishop Joan Enric Vives i Sicilia  
Bishop of Urgell and Co-Prince of Andorra, Spanish Bishops' Conference

Archbishop V. James Weisgerber  
Archbishop of Winnipeg, President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

•The Coordination of Episcopal Conferences in Support of the Church in the Holy Land represents Catholic bishops' conferences of Europe and North America and was formed in Jerusalem in 1998 at the request of the Holy See.