



PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

Jerusalem's Christian Spiritual Leaders Host the Archbishop of Canterbury and Collectively Call for Restraint, De-escalation of Violence, and Protection of Civilians

Jerusalem, October 21, 2023

"For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me." (Matthew 25:35-36)

We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, having gathered in prayer with Jerusalem's honorable guest, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, join with him in expressing, in the strongest possible terms, our condemnation of the Israeli airstrikes that exploded without warning at the Orthodox Church compound of Saint Porphyrios in Gaza on the night of October 19th.

These blasts led to the sudden and catastrophic collapse of two church halls around the scores of refugees, including women and children, sleeping within. Dozens found themselves instantly crushed beneath the rubble. Many were injured—some severely. At last count, eighteen have died, nine of whom were children.

In condemning this attack against a sacred place of refuge, we cannot ignore that this is but the latest instance of innocent civilians being injured or killed as a result of missile strikes against other shelters of last resort. Among these are schools and hospitals where refugees had fled because their homes were demolished in the relentless bombing campaign waged against residential areas in Gaza over the past two weeks.

Despite the devastation wrought upon our own and other social, religious, and humanitarian institutions, we, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches, nevertheless remain fully committed to fulfilling our sacred and moral duty of offering assistance, support, and refuge to those civilians who come to us in such desperate need. Even in the face of ceaseless military demands to evacuate our charitable institutions and houses of worship, we will not abandon this Christian mission, for there is literally no other safe place for these innocents to turn.

As the above passage of Scripture reminds us, our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to minister to the most vulnerable. And we must do so not only in times of peace. The church must especially act as the church in times of war, for that is when human suffering is at its greatest.

Yet we cannot accomplish this mission alone. We therefore call upon the international community to immediately enforce protections in Gaza for Sanctuaries of Refuge, such as hospitals, schools, and houses of worship. And we call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire so that food, water, and vital medical supplies can safely be delivered to the relief agencies ministering to the hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians in Gaza, including those operated by our own churches.

Finally, we call upon all warring parties to de-escalate the violence, cease from indiscriminately targeting civilians on all sides, and operate within the international rules of warfare. Only in this way, we believe, can the groundwork be laid for an eventual diplomatic consideration of longstanding grievances so that a just and lasting peace can finally be achieved throughout our beloved Holy Land—both in our time, and for generations to come.

—The Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem