



## **PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM**

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### **STATEMENT ON THE RECENT ATTACK ON CROWDS GATHERING TO RECEIVE HUMANITARIAN AID**

March 1, 2024

In the early morning hours of Thursday, February 29<sup>th</sup>, according to eye-witness testimonies, Israeli forces in southwest Gaza City opened fire on crowds of civilians seeking to receive sacks of flour to feed their starving families. The ensuing carnage resulted in the death of more than a hundred Gazans, with hundreds more seriously injured. Doctors on the scene and at receiving hospitals reported that most were killed or injured by gunfire, with some becoming victimized after being either trampled by panicked crowds or hit by aid trucks fleeing the horrific scene.

Although government spokesmen initially tried to deny the soldiers' involvement in this incident, later that day Israel's Minister of National Security not only praised IDF fighters for acting "excellently," but also attempted to blame the victims for their own demise, charging that they had sought to harm heavily armed soldiers. He went on to assail the delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza, arguing that it should cease.

That stated desire has already become a harsh reality for the half-million remaining in Gaza City, where aid deliveries have nearly halted because of heavy entry restrictions and lack of security escort for the delivery convoys. Humanitarian officials have so often warned of siege-induced famine in north Gaza that foreign governments of goodwill have been forced as a last resort to conduct humanitarian airdrops. Yet these offer only a tiny fraction of the relief that is needed for a remnant civilian population greater than that of Tel Aviv, Israel's second largest city.

In the aftermath of yesterday's horrifying events and their cruel context, We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, condemn this wanton attack against innocent civilians and call for the warring parties to reach an immediate and lengthy ceasefire that allows for the speedy disbursement of relief supplies throughout the Gaza strip, and for the enactment of a negotiated release of those held as captives and prisoners.

While expressing these entreaties on behalf of all innocents suffering from the war, we convey our special prayers of support to the Christian communities in Gaza under our pastoral care. These include the more than 800 Christians who have now taken refuge in St. Porphyrios and Holy Family Churches in Gaza City for nearly five months. We likewise extend these same expressions of solidarity to the intrepid staff and volunteers of the Anglican-run Ahli Hospital, and to the patients they serve.

In issuing the above calls, our ultimate hope is that the end of hostilities, the release of captives, and the care of the downtrodden will open a horizon for serious diplomatic discussions that finally lead to a just and lasting peace here in the land where our Lord Jesus Christ first took up his cross on our behalf. May God grant us all his grace as we seek the fulfilment of this hopeful Easter vision.