



For Immediate Release

4 August 2014

STATEMENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES ON THE GAZA DEVELOPMENTS

The South African Council of Churches and its member churches met today at Khotso House, to prayerfully consider the current tragic developments in Gaza.

As followers of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, we cannot be silent on the current painful horror unfolding before the eyes of the world in Gaza. The Churches are also acutely conscious of the growing turmoil and frightful loss of life in various countries of the African continent and the Middle East. The meeting today was however, focused on the Israel-Palestine bombardment and rocket launches.

We are aware that the current Gaza horror is a consequence and continuum of a decades-long conflict over the statehood and nationhood of Israelis and Palestinians. This has had significant milestones, beginning with the 1947 – 48 international proposals of two states and their borders; the significant 1967 game-changing war and its aftermath; the various efforts at negotiations, culminating at the historic Oslo Accords that came the closest to a successful two-state solution.

We believe that, had the Oslo compromise agreements been followed upon, we may be having a different reality today. We recognize that various political and economic interests and dynamics, which have fuelled the conflict to these tragic proportions, have shaped its historical ups and downs. And over time, many lives have been lost, and justice has been totally undermined. As a result we now have:

- An Israeli society that has been psyched into a state of war.
- Palestinian communities have been equally psyched into a state of desperation and yearning for normal citizen life.
- A situation therefore, that commits to war as a way to peace and security.
- Therefore total disregard for international law and humanitarian considerations such as we now have, with UN facilities being bombed and churches and hospitals being bombed, raising the toll of civilian deaths to frightening levels.
- Millions of Palestinians who were forcibly removed from their homes and homeland into refugee status outside Palestine.
- A security wall that traverses Palestinian villages, and cuts through families.

Our faith is directed by the message of Jesus Christ who, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah, declared that he had come to “proclaim liberty to captives”, and “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:16-21). Indeed we are inspired by the One who came “that all may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Our faith in Jesus Christ explicitly calls us to address issues of injustice.

The biblical scriptures call on us “to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Our theological convictions call upon us to side with the God’ of justice.

As part of the World Council of Churches, the SACC has been involved in the Israel Palestine situation, in support of efforts by justice-minded Israelis and Palestinians, to promote conditions for peace. In that context we have facilitated various delegations of church leaders and church people from our communities to be present with peace-promoting Israelis and Palestinians.

This on going WCC presence of pastoral care has informed the recent WCC call to the UN Security Council for the urgent action for the cessation of hostilities, as well as the recent impassionate call by Pope Francis for the violence to stop.

As part of that ministry, the SACC condemns unequivocally, the gross injustice of the current violent onslaught, and calls for an end to all the suffering in Israel-Palestine. The longer the war goes on the deeper the wounds will be and the longer they will take to heal. We further call for the following to adhered to in order to put an end to the current existing conflict and to achieve peace:

- Immediate ceasefire. There is no way to peace through war.
- The end and discontinuation of occupation, and the return to the considerations of a just and secure two-states approach with equality of status, each state with full rights to defend itself. There must be just peace, because peace without justice is no peace, and peace without security is no peace.
- The Security Council and international community must encourage all parties to come together to work towards a negotiated settlement.
- In this context we call for a fresh and credible international initiative to bring peace. This must take account of the sensitive issues for both parties on both sides:
 - The vexed question of on going and increasing occupation, and the creation of borders with integrity.
 - The stateless people that need to return home, into a proper state – a just base.
 - The serious question of the security of both Israel and Palestine.
- We call on churches to observe the Week of prayer on 21-27 September 2014.
- We encourage our member churches and our congregations to take time to educate themselves and deliberate prayerfully on these burning issues.
- We appeal to churches to provide resources for urgent humanitarian support that will be channelled through existing infrastructure systems.

For more details:

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