



## Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

A call for de-escalation of war in the Holy Land and peace

The number of people dying since the escalation of violent conflict between Israel and Palestine, precipitated by Hamas' killing of 700 Israelis, including women and children, is increasing daily on both sides. Furthermore, about 2.4 million Palestinians, mainly women, children and the elderly, are blocked access to water, food, health services and electricity.

They suffer this deprivation amid intense and continuous heavy bombardment of the Gaza territory by the Israel Defence Force to find Hamas militants and stop its activities. We affirm the right and obligation of the Israeli government to protect its citizens. In the same breath, we note that the bombardment is causing the suffering and death of a huge number of civilian Palestinians with no connection to Hamas activities.

Hamas's killing of ordinary Israeli citizens cannot be justified even by the cause Hamas claims to be fighting for. Equally, the hurt, anger and sense of obligation by the Israeli government to avenge Hamas's acts and prevent it from causing further harm does not justify the means they apply towards this end as it results in the suffering and death of innocent Palestinians. Two wrongs don't make a right; the innocent lives of both the Israelis and Palestinians are precious and must be protected.

It is this consideration of the precious lives of the citizens of both sides that the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) appeals for a ceasefire and that a humane way of dealing with the present situation be found to eliminate further suffering and deaths. We particularly request an immediate restoration of food supply, electricity and health care to the Palestinian people in Gaza, which are the basic necessities of life.

We pray that our shared appreciation of the preciousness of life will see us finding a peaceful solution to the longstanding tension between these two nations and to see them "hammering their swords into ploughshares (so that) nation will not lift sword against nation" (cf. Micah: 4:3) because as Pope Francis recently stated the option of "every war is a defeat".

May Peace reign in the hearts of all.

Bishop Sithembele Sipuka  
SACBC President  
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