



Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

Invitation for Prayer for Peace in the Holy Land and other War-torn countries

At its meeting from the 7th to the 9th of November 2023 at the Lumko Institute, Benoni, the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) Administrative Board noted with great sadness the escalating intensity of the war in the Gaza Strip and West Bank resulting in large numbers of civilians being killed. The number is currently estimated to be over 10,000 and continues to grow. The number of journalists and United Nations Staff killed in Gaza is also reported to be growing.

The gruesome attack and killing of Israeli civilians by Hamas, including children and the elderly, sparked off this present version of defence by the Israeli army, which in practice does not differentiate between the innocent civilians and the targeted Hamas. This killing of civilians by both sides is against all the conventions of war and indicates an extreme hatred that both sides are not able to control but instead are controlled by it.

For this reason, the Board, on behalf of the SACBC, encourages and supports all efforts of engagement with Israeli authorities for a reasonable manner of dealing with this situation in such a way that the lives of innocent civilians, children, the elderly and women are saved. We re-echo the appeal to the simple truth that two wrongs do not make a right. We renew our call for an immediate ceasefire and the creation of a safe space to deliver the much-needed aid.

Furthermore, the Board invites all the Bishops of the Conference area and their Dioceses to continuous prayer for peace in the land of the birth of our Lord. We are moved and inspired by the example of the Lord, who loved and cherished the humanity of everyone regardless of nationality; as St. Paul affirms, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

While thankful for the comprehensive coverage of the war in the Gaza Strip, which significantly contributes to the heightened awareness of the woeful suffering of the civilians there, there are also many other war-torn areas in Africa (e.g., Sudan, DRC, Burkina Faso, Tigray, Mozambique etc.) and other parts of the world that are not so well-covered by the media. These areas, too, are to be included in the prayer intentions for peace.

The Board proposes that on the Feast of Christ the King (26 November), the Prince of Peace, all Parishes in the Conference area have a special prayer for Peace in the Holy Land and other war-torn areas. It is suggested that the petitions of the day close with the prayer of peace attributed to St Francis of Assisi.

Let us all unite in praying not only for this present crisis but also for a just, peaceful and sustainable resolution to this long-standing tension between these two nations of the Holy Land.

May justice prevail among all people and lead to peaceful coexistence, Amen.

+Sithembele Sipuka
SACBC President
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