



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND - FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL - FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Office of the General Secretary

H.E. Mr Yasser Arafat
President
Palestinian Authority

3 April 2002

Your Excellency,

It has been a bitter thing, during the recent holy days of Easter, to watch the unprecedented escalation of conflict in Israel-Palestine, and to count the rising toll of innocent civilians among both Palestinians and Israelis. And it has grieved me deeply to see the deliberate destruction and siege under which the Israeli forces have placed the Palestinian Authority and its elected leadership.

Though events may seem to have rendered it obsolete, I applaud your affirmative reception of the Saudi peace plan, which envisages a future in which the Arab world and the State of Israel might live side-by-side in peace. I express the acknowledgment and appreciation of the Lutheran World Federation of your statement of willingness to implement an unconditional cease-fire. And I encourage you to hold fast to the objective of peace, even as you are beset now by war. Your public declaration of a continued dedication to peace and rejection of suicide bombings as a means of resistance would have added power in the midst of the war now being waged against you and your people.

Yesterday, I received reports from the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem that the church, the pastor's home and the church's International Centre had been hit by shelling from Israeli forces. This can only be seen as an assault on the place of worship of that community of Lutheran church members, in clear violation of international law and moral responsibility.

I have also received reports from the Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem that staff from Hebron, Beit Jala, Bethlehem and all neighbouring villages are facing increasing difficulties in entering Jerusalem, despite holding Israeli-issued permits, resulting in severe disruption of the health services provided by the AVH at a time when they are most needed. Hospitals are running out of supplies, and blood stocks are dwindling in some places. The humanitarian consequences of the disruption of these essential health services in the context of the current conflict are obvious.

In the midst of this crisis, your leadership is more important for your people than ever, and I pray that you will be given strength and wisdom in carrying this heavy responsibility at such a difficult time. I pray for your personal safety, and for that of the Palestinian families throughout the southern West Bank that now find tanks and soldiers in their streets, as well as for that of Israeli citizens who increasingly face a daily risk of suicide attack. I pray that the children of Abraham might yet be reconciled with the help of God, where human skill has so tragically failed.

Yours respectfully,

Ishmael Noko
General Secretary