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LWF Statement on the Violence in Gaza

Abide by International Law: The Duty to Protect Civilians

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) expresses its profound shock and sadness at the rising casualties of innocent civilians, including children, in the Gaza conflict. People are indiscriminately attacked, only given short warning with no safe place to find refuge, or possibly used as human shields. It is distressing when access to the wounded and dead becomes impossible and emergency services are hampered and overwhelmed making people's suffering even worse. Our thoughts and prayers go out to those in agony as a result of the continued shelling and bombing of densely populated areas in Gaza.

While reiterating the LWF's conviction that violence and wars are not means to resolve differences, wars and violent conflicts remain a part of human history. However, throughout the years humankind has learned from its mistakes and worst experiences. For that reason, it developed a set of internationally negotiated, binding and customary international laws to protect the life and dignity of every human being, particularly of civilian populations in times of conflict. It agreed on principles of what should never happen, even in the midst of fiercest conflict. Among these are the recently adopted principles of the responsibility to protect.

Today, we observe with deepest concern and dismay that these standards are being deliberately ignored in Gaza. In view of this, the LWF states with all firmness: conflicts and wars do not, and cannot provide any excuse to cease observing international obligations. As we have seen in the past, tampering with these obligations only opens the floodgates for atrocities, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The LWF reiterates its urgent call upon the parties to the conflict (Israel and the Palestine Resistance Committee, including Hamas) to agree on an immediate and unconditional ceasefire.

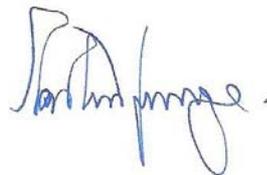
Until the urgent ceasefire is finally reached, and in order to halt the unacceptably rising death toll of civil population and to ease human suffering, the LWF furthermore calls upon:

- Parties in conflict to:
 - Allow for unimpeded humanitarian access as prescribed by international humanitarian law.
 - Strictly respect and adhere to international humanitarian law and other relevant binding and customary international legal instruments.

- International community to:
 - Step in and broker an immediate ceasefire, and resume the direct peace negotiation that addresses the root causes of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and solve it according to international law.
 - Move beyond rhetoric and the stalemate of geopolitical interests, of which the UN Security Council has become increasingly hostage, and enforce applicable international laws for the protection of civilians and easing of human suffering.
 - Embrace a broad definition of civilian protection that includes humanitarian assistance and guarantees human rights standards, as well as the prevention of physical harm.



Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan
President



Rev. Martin Junge
General Secretary

23 July 2014