



The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)

Statement by Bishop Dr. Munib Younan

June 15, 2007

We have been warning for some time now that the situation here in the Occupied Palestinian territories – especially Gaza - is untenable and explosive. I fear that unless we take drastic action, we will sink into all-out, protracted civil war that will dramatically fuel the fires of extremism, violence and chaos in the Middle East. This could further radicalize the whole Middle East and perhaps tip us over a turning point toward religious fanaticism that would be hard to change. So I speak today to urge leaders, combatants, ordinary people and the international community: for God's sake and the sake of all those suffering here from violence and oppression, stop the internal violence, end the international aid boycott and implement a serious plan to end the illegal, 40-year occupation of the Palestinian people.

The heads of local churches in Jerusalem issued a statement Wednesday, June 13, 2007, calling on all Palestinian brothers to put down their arms against one another and stop the violence immediately. There is no justification for this violence, and it only damages the legitimate cause of the Palestinian people for self-determination, our own state and an end to occupation.

Sisters and brothers of Palestine, accept your responsibility to end all violence and return to the higher ground and aim of non-violent struggle to this illegal occupation. People of the Arab League, please step in and help us regain our balance.

Although a resolution to this conflict seems so unreachable, we already know the solutions: follow international law, UN resolutions and basic human rights law. Implement the two-state solution, based on the 1948 armistice line (the Green Line), which would lead to two equal, viable, sovereign states, each with Jerusalem as its capital, just resolution to the refugee problem, shared resources and ending the policy of settlements.

So as I sit in Jerusalem trying to analyze what is happening and why, I can't help but wonder. Why, instead of implementing the many relevant UN resolutions supporting these concepts (66 in all), has the international community ignored them all these years and continued to allow the confiscation of Palestinian land and building up almost 500,000 illegal settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Why, if the West wants to foster democracy, did they reject the outcome of democratic elections held under occupation with little violence and boycott the new government? Why has the international community sat by and watched the longest occupation in history – 40 years – and then placed an unprecedented boycott on them, which amounts to sanctions against a captive people. How is this possible? Maybe it is time for **deep** self-evaluation for Palestinians, Israelis and the international community.

For this reason, from Jerusalem I call on international leaders of the world to wake up and see that some of their policies have had devastating negative effects on this conflict and, in fact, the whole Middle East. Realistically, what can one expect in Gaza when you lock 1.5 million people into a tiny patch of land 20 miles long by 5-10 miles wide, virtually seal the borders except for a small fraction of trade and then completely stop the already meager salaries? A recent OxFam study of families in Gaza showed that the average family in Gaza has an average debt of \$1750, in a land where a school principle only earns about \$6000 per year. And in the West Bank, what can we expect when you herd people into tiny enclaves, take away freedom of movement and allow continued violations of human rights to go on behind walls of concrete and barbed wire fences?

Leaders of the world, your complicity in allowing and supporting the illegal occupation and your unprecedented action in boycotting this occupied people have created a humanitarian, political and economic crisis that now threatens not only the people of Palestine, but also Israel and the whole region. The Arab and Muslim world see this conflict as the litmus test for how the West treats them, and until some justice and improvement on the ground occurs for Palestinians, it will continue to fuel the fires of fanaticism in the whole Middle East.

If you want to bring an end to the horrific violence in the Middle East and if you are concerned as I am by the rampant growth of religious extremism: please, I urge your from Jerusalem, get serious about implementing the two-state solution, begin immediate serious talks about these issues with all sides and end the illegal and immoral boycott and occupation.

If we truly want to end this deadly stalemate and build a modern, democratic civil society in Palestine living side by side in a just peace with Israel, let us use our resources to educate our children and not to buy weapons to oppress them. We in the ELCJHL continue to be committed to a just solution based on international law and to see education as the key in preparing the future leaders who can lead us from occupation to freedom, from fear to mutual trust and from violence to peace/salaam/shalom.

For more information about the churches, schools and ministries of the ELCJHL, see www.holyland-lutherans.org.

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