



## **Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference**

Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' (Matt 25:40)

We, the Catholic Bishops of Southern Africa were distraught to learn of the killings, injuries and wanton destruction caused by the Israeli Defence Force in the compound of the Holy Family Catholic Church in Gaza yesterday. We condemn this attack against the tiny Christian population in the land which we hold so dear, and we condemn the ongoing violence in the area in the strongest terms.

As the Latin Patriarchate has said so clearly in response, this has indeed been the fate of Gazans since 7 October 2023. We condemned the massacre by Hamas then but have been horrified that the response to the October 2023 massacres has been exceedingly disproportionate, contrary to the Human Rights Convention and Protocol for Peace and the Conduct of War.

The response to the massacre is now widely acknowledged across the world as genocide and ethnic cleansing. We share that assessment and so have given our support to the South African government's case at the ICJ in The Hague accusing Israel of perpetrating acts of genocide. We had hoped that this would be one peaceful way of bringing pressure to bear on the warring parties to bring an end to this spiral of violence. It has not. The many countries which continue to supply weapons and sustain the rhetoric of war have made themselves complicit in what history will surely record as a 'crime against humanity'.

Following Pope Francis' exhortation, we call for an end to the manufacture of weapons and also for a speedy end to the export of weapons to theatres of war.

In keeping with the teaching of Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), we deplore the priest and Levite who avoided the reality of violence, pain and suffering and who turned their backs on the victim of theft and dispossession. If we remain silent now in the face of this ongoing violence, amidst the reality of the theft of land and houses and olive groves, then we will be no better than those who crossed over to the other side.

We therefore raise our voices in protest against the ongoing genocide, we join our voices with Pope Leo XIV in calling for a lasting ceasefire and for the release of hostages - including those in administrative detention.

We realise only too well that our prayers and solidarity have to be matched by actions. We call for nonviolent action, for boycotts in several spheres, protest action and denunciation of the spread of war across the Middle East. It has become one of the last acts of solidarity open to us and so we offer our condemnation of the hostilities in that spirit, with the hope that all people of goodwill will respond.

Cardinal Stephen Brislin

President - Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

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