



COVER NOTE

The ACT Palestine Forum in consultation with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, is submitting the below statement on the severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza and its broader implications on the region.

TOPIC

This statement addresses the severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza, highlighting the suffering of the Palestinian population due to ongoing violence and blockades. It emphasizes the failure and shortcomings of the international community and some religious organizations to act against these atrocities and consistently condemn and hold accountable those that are breaching international law - on all sides as per the rulings of the International Court of Justice - to press for unfettered humanitarian aid, an end to the war and to the illegal Israeli military Occupation, application of international human rights law, the release of hostages and illegally detained on both sides and a credible path to a long term political settlement and a just peace. The broader implications of the conflict for the region are alarming and ongoing, highlighting the critical role of religious actors in fostering reconciliation and pushing for the realization of human rights.

STATEMENT

Together for Justice: Our Collective Action on Palestine

28 October–1 November 2024

As people of faith, we are deeply troubled by the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The daily atrocities we witness challenge both International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and our core principles of compassion, solidarity, dignity, respect, inclusion, and justice. It is unacceptable that organizations providing essential humanitarian aid in Gaza and in Occupied Palestine face significant barriers to delivering life-saving assistance to those in dire need. We are equally troubled by the silence of those religious communities and faith-based organizations, who have failed to speak out against the war in Gaza, recognize the suffering of people and have been weak in their support for international laws that are designed to protect civilians in conflict.

After 76 years of Al Nakba, the military occupation of Palestine, and 16 years of blockade in Gaza, tensions once again erupted as Hamas launched an attack on areas surrounding the besieged Gaza Strip resulting in the killing of over one thousand Israelis and foreign nationals, most of them civilians, and involved the taking of more than 200 hostages; more than 43 thousand Palestinians in Gaza have been killed, not including those who are missing or injured, a majority of them women and children. Most of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been forcedly displaced from their homes. Most of them have no home to return to, since they have been intentionally destroyed or damaged beyond repair. In addition to all universities, the majority of the schools and hospitals, as well as places of worship have been destroyed. Diseases and famine, due to severe deprivation of food and essential medication, are striking fear in the hearts of an exhausted population. A number of Israeli hostages have been killed through the effects of IDF rescue operations, and more remain in captivity.

Our actions as churches are inspired by the belief that change is not only possible but inevitable when we live our faith with courage and conviction. We stand in solidarity with those who suffer among both the Palestinians and Israelis, recognizing their shared humanity. We are committed to uphold the God-given dignity and rights of all people, working to bridge divides and foster a future where peace and justice prevail.

The cries of suffering from Gaza and the ongoing struggle for lasting peace resonate across the world, reminding us of the vital role of Christian and ecumenical actors in advocating for those in need and distress. We have a shared responsibility to uphold human dignity and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those in need without obstruction. By actively engaging and using our platforms, we can advocate for and contribute to meaningful change that paves the way for lasting and just peace for all.

There can be no peace without justice, nor justice without peace.

A superficial peace that ignores underlying injustices is fragile and unsustainable. True and lasting peace requires addressing the root causes of the conflict, ensuring justice, adherence to international conventions, an end to the illegal occupation, and the upholding of human rights. Pursuing justice through violent means only perpetuates cycles of revenge and conflict. Therefore, justice must be sought in ways that promote reconciliation, healing, and stability.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) “concluded that it is plausible that Israel's actions in Gaza Strip could amount to genocide and issued provisional measures, in which it ordered Israel to take all measures to prevent any acts contrary to the 1948 Genocide Convention”.¹ As faith-based organizations committed to international law, we support the ICJ in its critical work. Religious leaders and actors have a significant responsibility in actively preventing atrocities. In line with ACT Alliance’s engagement in the “[Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that could lead to Atrocity Crimes](#)”, and the promotion of the [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#), we are called to work towards the prevention of atrocities and genocide. Protecting civilians from the ravages of conflict and war crimes is a collective responsibility.

Furthermore, on 19 July 2024, the ICJ reminded all states of their responsibilities. Its advisory opinion concluded that Israel’s continued occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory is unlawful and needs to end as soon as possible, including the cessation of any new settlement activities.

Israel’s ongoing assault on Gaza has exacerbated the already complex situation in the West Bank. Settlers have intensified their violence and are exploiting the political chaos to further expand illegal settlements and to attack defenseless Palestinian civilians with impunity. This deliberate strategy seems to be intended to facilitate the annexation of the West Bank, as outlined in plans recorded by members of the Israeli government. Meanwhile, Palestinian prisoners and detainees endure horrific conditions including torture and ill-treatment, without oversight or accountability. The international community must urgently address human rights violations, the breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and work towards a just and lasting peace.

The implications of this war extend far beyond Gaza and Palestine, putting the entire MENA region and specifically Lebanon in a state of war, uncertain of what may unfold next. The Middle East is currently facing a critical security situation and the failure to find

¹ <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203454>

common ground has pushed the region into the verge of a catastrophic war, potentially leading to a bloodier and wider war.

Commitments & Recommendations

As ACT Alliance members, we commit to work proactively towards stopping the atrocities and promoting peace and dignity for those affected by the conflict. We call on all international actors, including States to:

1. Call for and enact an immediate ceasefire and allow unfettered access for increased humanitarian assistance into Gaza by UNRWA and others, the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers, protection of and full access for journalists and humanitarian actors, the upholding of international law, and a reopening of dialogue towards a lasting peace agreement.
2. Establish a clear, efficient and permanent medical evacuation procedure to hospitals in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and beyond.
3. Release all hostages and illegally detained on both sides.
4. Actively work to deescalate the current cycle of violence and conflict in the broader Middle East region.

We also call on all ACT Alliance members, their related churches and faith leaders to:

1. Stress the significant responsibility of religious leaders in denouncing the risk factors of genocide and preventing atrocities.
2. Use their position of authority and prophetic witness to speak out against the injustices in Gaza, mobilizing and supporting efforts for peace, justice, humanitarian assistance, and protection of human rights based on Christian ethics and values.
3. Support efforts towards accountability and justice through legal mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.
4. Initiate peace building visits and solidarity campaigns, and strengthen partnerships with local Christian communities and church-related organizations in the Holy Land, providing them with the necessary support and resources to withstand the challenges they face and to protect their presence and heritage in the region.
5. Mobilize solidarity campaigns, visits, and raise awareness among member churches and ACT Alliance member organizations about the plight of Palestinian

Christians and the need for sustained action to protect their presence and heritage in the region.

6. Work ecumenically and across faiths to advocate for a long-lasting, just and peaceful solution.
7. To encourage member organizations to ethically invest their resources/assets in a way that would not lead to fuel the war.

A majority of the assembly has declared itself in agreement with the opinions expressed in this statement.

While many ACT members agree with the public statement, there are members who have expressed differing perspectives on the content or tone. Their decision reflects the diverse viewpoints within our alliance, and we respect their choice to abstain or vote against. As always, we value the collective dialogue and encourage continued discussions on the matter at hand, recognizing the strength of our unity in diversity