



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

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***Salaam and grace to you from Jerusalem, City of Peace!***

***March 5, 2008***

We are profoundly and deeply saddened by the recent escalation of violence that killed 8 in the Yeshiva last night and 120 in Gaza in the last week. We express our sincere condolences to all who are mourning the loss of loved ones.

We in the church have been steady and strong voices for non-violence. As it says in one of our Lutheran schools, "violence is the tool of the incompetent." I believe it is also the tool of the desperate and the hopeless. This is not to excuse any violence on any side but to face the hard reality that unless people have something to live for they have nothing to lose. A human rights report this week reports that the 1.4 million people in Gaza are suffering the worst conditions in 40 years, with 80% dependent on food aid, 40% unemployment, hospitals with great basic shortages of materials and electricity and sewage and water systems that are under collapse. We in the church are afraid that this situation will only spawn more retaliation and revenge that benefits no one.

We must not allow the deterioration of the situation to accelerate the vicious cycle of violence. Lasting peace and security will never come at the point of a gun or in the rubble of the shelling, but only through hard and tough dialogue and the upholding of equal human rights and international law.

Leaders and people in the Holy Land – Muslim, Christian and Jew – it is our duty to our children to show them that there are other ways to solve our problems. It is our duty to work for the sanctity of all human life and to raise the voices of the moderates who comprise a vast majority of the people on both sides. We cannot allow the extremists and the cycle of revenge and counter-revenge to hold the prospects of justice and peace hostage.

We urge our sisters and brothers in this Land, Israeli and Palestinian, to stop the violence: the missiles, shelling, shooting, rockets and incursions, and to restore basic human rights to the people of Gaza. Only through dialogue that represents all parties, including those we deem enemies, will bring a lasting and durable peace based on justice.

May God bless all the families of those who have been killed, and may God help us together, to reach a more just and dignified future for us all. With the writer of Revelation, we yearn for the day when "death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more." (Rev. 21:4)

We ask all our partner churches in the world and all people of good conscience to make time in their services for prayers of mercy for all people in the Holy Land.

Sincerely,

Bishop Munib Younan