

Bishops call for leaders of hope

Statement of the Co-ordination of Bishops' Conferences in support of the Church in the Holy Land, 15 January 2014

As bishops from Europe, South Africa and North America we came to the Holy Land to pray with and support the Christian community and the cause of peace. In Gaza we witnessed the deep poverty of the people, and the courageous presence of the small and vulnerable Christian communities there.

Gaza is a man-made disaster, a shocking scandal, an injustice that cries out to the human community for a resolution. We call upon political leaders to improve the humanitarian situation of the people in Gaza, assuring access to the basic necessities for a dignified human life, the possibilities for economic development, and freedom of movement.

In the seemingly hopeless situation of Gaza, we met people of hope. We were encouraged by our visit to tiny Christian communities, which day after day, through many institutions, reach out with compassion to the poorest of the poor, both Muslim and Christian. We continue to pray for and support the priests, religious and laypeople working in Gaza. They exercise a ministry of presence, care for disabled children and the elderly, and teach the young.

Their testimony of faith, hope and love gave us hope. This is precisely the hope needed at this moment to bring peace, a peace that can only be built on justice and equity for both peoples. Palestinians and Israelis desperately need this peace. For example, in the Cremisan valley the route of the security barrier threatens the agricultural land held for generations by 58 Christian families. The current peace talks come at a critical time. Now is the time to ensure that the aspirations for justice of both sides are fulfilled.

We urge public officials to become leaders of hope, not people of obstruction. We call upon them to listen to the words of Pope Francis, who recently said to the Diplomatic Corps: "The resumption of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians is a positive sign, and I express my hope that both parties will resolve, with the support of the international community, to take courageous decisions aimed at finding a just and lasting solution to a conflict which urgently needs to end" (13 JANUARY, 2014).

As we leave the Holy Land, the bishops and people of the local Church remain in our hearts. They are not alone. Together with them we are people of hope. We pray that the visit of Pope Francis to the Holy Land will reinforce hope in the region. We believe a lasting peace is possible.

Archbishop Stephen Brislin, South Africa
Bishop Pierre Burcher, Scandinavia
Bishop William Crean, Ireland
Bishop Michel Dubost, France
Archbishop Paul-Andre Durocher, Canada

Archbishop Patrick Kelly, England and Wales
Bishop William Kenney, England and Wales
Bishop Declan Lang, England and Wales
Bishop Denis Nulty, Ireland
Bishop Richard Pates, United States of America
Bishop Thomas Renz, Germany
Bishop Janusz Stepnowski, Poland
Archbishop Joan Enric Vives, Spain