

Holy Land Coordination 2020

We must not ignore the voice of people in the Holy Land

Every year we come to encounter and hear the people of the Holy Land. We are inspired by their enduring resilience and faith in a worsening situation.

In their recent powerful message, the local Catholic Bishops lamented the international community's failure to help realise justice and peace here in the place of Christ's birth.¹ Our governments must do more to meet their responsibilities for upholding international law and protecting human dignity. In some cases they have become actively complicit in the evils of conflict and occupation.

The local Bishops also warned that people are facing further "*evaporation of hope for a durable solution*". We have witnessed this reality first-hand, particularly how construction of settlements and the separation wall is destroying any prospect of two states existing in peace.

In the same message, the local Bishops have sounded the alarm about living conditions becoming "*more and more unbearable*". This is painfully clear in the West Bank where our sisters and brothers are denied even basic rights including freedom of movement. In Gaza the political decisions of all sides have resulted in the creation of an open air prison, human rights abuses and a profound humanitarian crisis. We were welcomed by families whose focus is now day-to-day survival and whose aspirations have been reduced to bare essentials such as electricity and clean water.

Amid these circumstances we are moved by the sacrifice of religious sisters, lay people and priests who are reaching out with respect to every side, in order to

¹ "*The recent developments in the Palestine-Israel context, the ongoing loss of lives, the continuing evaporation of hope for a durable solution, and the failure of the international community to insist on the application of international law to save the peoples of this land from more struggle and despair, have reached a point where we witness more extremism and discrimination. Even those who once presented themselves as guardians of democracy and promoters of peace, have become power-brokers and partisan participants in the conflict.*"

build a better future for all. They offer vital services, especially education, job opportunities and care for the most vulnerable people. We give thanks for their witness.

We encourage Christians in our own countries to pray for and support this mission. The increase in people making pilgrimages to the Holy Land is encouraging and we call for those who come to ensure they encounter the local communities.

At the same time we implore our governments to help build a new political solution rooted in human dignity for all. While this must ultimately be shaped by the peoples of the Holy Land in dialogue, there is an urgent need for our countries to play their part by:

Insisting upon the application of international law;

Following the Holy See's lead in recognising the State of Palestine;

Addressing the security concerns of Israel and the right of all to live in safety;

Rejecting political or economic support for settlements;

And resolutely opposing acts of violence or abuses of human rights by any side.

In taking these steps the international community can meaningfully stand in solidarity with those Israelis and Palestinians who are refusing to give up their non-violent struggle for justice, peace and human rights.

We pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Bishop Declan Lang (Chair of the Holy Land Coordination)

England and Wales

Bishop Udo Bentz

Germany

Archbishop Timothy Broglio

United States of America

Bishop Peter Bürcher

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden

Bishop Rodolfo Cetoloni

Italy

Bishop Christopher Chessun

Church of England

Archbishop Richard Gagnon

Canada

Bishop William Kenney

England and Wales

Bishop Alan McGuckian

Ireland

Bishop William Nolan

Scotland

Bishop Marc Stenger

France

Bishop Noel Treanor

Ireland

Archbishop Joan Enric Vives Sicilia

Spain

Fr Antonio Ammirati

Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe

Dr Erwin Tanner

Switzerland

Pictures of the Holy Land Coordination 2020 are available at: [flickr.com/photos/catholicism](https://www.flickr.com/photos/catholicism)