

‘We cannot be silent’: A statement from the Jesuits on Gaza – 28.3.24

Gerard O’Connell writes: ‘Israeli soldiers continue to operate in the Gaza Strip amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas - and attacks have spread throughout the Middle East region, including Iraq, leaving Christians there feeling anxious. In a strong gesture of protest, the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) issued the following statement in Rome, March 28, in which they say they “cannot be silent” in the face of the killing, famine and spread of disease in Gaza as Israel continues its bombardment. They denounce the fact “that no one is able to stop the killing” in Gaza and elsewhere in Israel/Palestine. They join Pope Francis in calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all the hostages and the beginning of negotiations and a process that will lead to peace in the Holy Land and in the Middle East where many of them are working.’

Almost six months of war in Gaza, and the guns have not fallen silent. We, the members of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), like so many other Catholics, Christians, men and women of all faiths and non-believers, refuse to be silent. Our voices continue to be lifted up in prayer, in lament, in protest at the death and destruction that continue to reign in Gaza and other territories in Israel/Palestine, spilling over into the surrounding countries of the Middle East.

Following the horrors of the attacks on southern Israel on 7 October 2023, the massive Israeli bombardments of the Gaza Strip, the ground offensive that has left most of the Gaza Strip in ruins, we are now witness to famine and the spread of disease in Gaza. Tens of thousands have died and almost one thousand eight hundred Israelis, over thirty-two thousand Palestinians (not including those still to be unearthed from under the rubble). In addition to the lives snuffed out, there are hundreds of thousands of lives ruined,

those who are wounded, homeless, and now hungry and smitten by disease. We, Jesuits, reiterate our commitment not to remain silent. It is unacceptable that, despite attempts, almost six months into the present round of conflict, no one has been able to stop the killing. It is scandalous that no one has been able to ensure that the residents of Gaza have enough to eat. It is shameful that no one has been able to call the warmongers to account. Sadly, we remember that an ongoing conflict in the land called to be holy has been allowed to continue and fester as an open wound on the face of the Middle East.

Engaged for decades in the communities and societies of the Middle East, we, as Jesuits, want to say that it need not be this way. The choice of death over life, vengeance over reconciliation, wrongdoing over justice, self-interest over relationship, violence over dialogue is a choice and not fated destiny. There are other choices that could be made. We will continue to foster a dream of a different future, a future already foreseen by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures. *“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4).*

We join our voice to that of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, who has repeatedly warned: “War is a defeat! Every war is a defeat” (Angelus, 8 October 2023). We repeat the call for an immediate ceasefire, for the release of all the 7 October hostages, for negotiations and for the beginning of a process that will bring freedom, liberty and justice for all in the Middle East, the only road to true peace.