

# Open Letter Petitioning for a Ceasefire in Gaza

As Australian Christians we have been watching the developments that have unfolded in Gaza in the wake of the 7 October 2023 Hamas-led attack on Israel with a heavy heart, and a growing conviction that we need to respond. Our response to these events is informed by a number of realities:

- the horrific nature of the 7 October attack, which led to the deaths of more than 1,000 people, including 695 Israeli citizens (36 of whom were children), and the taking of approximately 250 civilian and military hostages;
- the scale and nature of the Israeli response, which has included attacks on hospitals, schools, mosques and churches, has already led to the deaths of more than 32,000 Palestinian residents of Gaza (including over 13,000 children), and has inflicted catastrophic and ongoing damage on the infrastructure and systems which residents of Gaza rely upon for power, water, food and basic medical assistance;
- the long history of dispersal and recurring persecution that has been endured by the Jewish people for two thousand years, in many cases under rulers who professed Christian faith, and the attempted genocide of the Nazi Holocaust;
- the painful experience of dispossession, discrimination and violence that has been suffered by the Palestinian people for more than three-quarters of a century, including the massacres and land-seizures of 1948, the Israeli occupation of UN-declared Palestinian territories since 1967, the blockade imposed on the Gaza strip since 2007, and the growth of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories;
- the terror and insecurity that Israeli citizens experience as a consequence of the various forms of Palestinian resistance that have involved the targeting of civilian victims;
- the message of the Torah and the Prophets, contained within the Hebrew Scriptures (which also form the Old Testament of the Christian Bible), which includes repeated commands to the people of God to defend the cause of the vulnerable, and to provide safe haven for refugees and justice for non-Israelite residents in the land.
- the words of Jesus, which echo the commands of the Torah and the Prophets and pronounce a blessing on those who hunger and thirst for justice and are active in the pursuit of peace.

In view of these realities, we call on the Australian government to:

- urgently advocate for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, including the cessation of hostilities on the part of the Israeli Defence Forces, Hamas, and all other militant groups that have been involved in the conflict, the return of all hostages and political prisoners currently held by Hamas and the Israeli government, and immediate and secure access to humanitarian aid and relief;
- appeal to the governments of our allies, including the United States of America, to adopt a similar stance and to cease providing military assistance of any kind to parties actively engaged in the conflict;
- contribute generously to cooperative international efforts to provide humanitarian aid to civilian victims of the conflict and prepare for the rebuilding of Gaza after the cessation of hostilities;
- advocate for a durable and just settlement in Israel and Palestine, that will allow for the peaceful coexistence of the Palestinian and Israeli people, within secure and internationally recognised borders, and will include a just regime of repatriation or reparations for all those who have been forced from their homes by this conflict and those which preceded it.

In signing this letter we do not presume to speak for all members of the organisations in which we serve as leaders, or to represent the viewpoints stated above as the official position of those organisations, but rather to give expression to our own deeply-held personal convictions.

Please be assured of our continued prayer for peace in the region, and for wisdom for and success for those who strive for it.

## Signatories

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