

Christian leaders take public action on Ash Wednesday to call for a ceasefire, a political process, and humanitarian assistance to Gaza

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Washington, DC – On Wednesday, February 14 at 11:00 AM in Lafayette Park by the White House, national Christian organizations and peacemakers will launch a weekly Lenten Ceasefire Campaign, starting with a Catholic Mass to be followed by an ecumenical public witness, to call attention to and in mourning for the tens of thousands of lives that have been destroyed in Gaza and Israel since October 7, 2023.

The Lenten season (held this year from Ash Wednesday, February 14, until Good Friday, March 29) is an annual time of reflection, repentance, and renewal, in commemoration of the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert before his crucifixion and resurrection (celebrated on Easter).

This year, weekly strategic nonviolent actions will take place during Lent to call on President Biden, a Catholic, and members of Congress, particularly those who are Christian, to abide by Jesus' way of courageous love and urge them to:

- a) Publicly call for bilateral ceasefire to prevent the further loss of life
- b) Support demilitarization rather than supplying additional military aid or arms to Israel
- c) Focus on a release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners held without due process
- d) Support robust humanitarian assistance and restarting U.S. government funding to UNRWA, the UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees
- e) Work diplomatically to end the siege on Gaza and end the occupation of the Palestinian Territory in order to address the root causes of the violence, accountability for harm, and move all parties toward a lasting, just peace that protects all human life and ensures long-term security and sustainability in the Middle East

The organizations involved with this Lenten campaign believe that the focus must shift to diplomacy, accountability mechanisms, and strategic peacebuilding, and that neither war nor retribution is sustainable. We believe urgent action is needed to stop the mass slaughter, destruction, and generational trauma.

The Catholic Mass will start at 11 AM; the ecumenical prayer witness will begin about 12 PM.

Co-sponsors of the Lenten Ceasefire Campaign include Churches for Middle East Peace; Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces; Dorothy Day Catholic Worker; Festival Center; Franciscan Action Network; Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA); Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns; National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd; National Council of Churches, USA; Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace; Pax Christi USA; Quixote Center; Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team; Sojourners; United Church of Christ; Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)

Quotes from religious and organizational leaders:

"The extraordinary damage inflicted today on the people of Gaza and the Occupied Territories is a crime against humanity. The administration and Congress must demilitarize this conflict rather than supply additional military

aid or arms to Israel, which will only increase the violence and result in greater suffering. As a member of the international Catholic peace movement, Pax Christi USA strives to bring Christ's message of all-embracing love to everyone. We urge our fellow Catholic, Joe Biden, to choose the path of nonviolence, take clear steps to end this bloodshed, and promote a just peace." *Johnny Zokovitch, Executive Director, Pax Christi USA*

"In the midst of such devastating times in the Middle East, our main goal is the prevention of further deaths and destruction, especially as the death toll in Gaza steadily increases. The prevention of genocide must be a key priority as we call for a comprehensive ceasefire, immediate aid and assistance to Gaza, the release of hostages and political prisoners, and that core issues of the decades long conflict between Israelis and Palestinians be addressed." *Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, Executive Director, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)*

"After 131 days of death and destruction we continue to say what we have said from the beginning: There is no military solution to this devastating crisis, only a political one that achieves justice, safety, and self-determination for Palestinians and Israelis alike. The more than one million Palestinians currently sheltering in Rafah are running out of time. It's long past time for our government use its full diplomatic and financial power to achieve an immediate and sustained bilateral ceasefire, the release of all Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners held without due process, and a sustained surge in humanitarian aid sufficient to meet the needs of the civilians in Gaza, while insisting on immediate and persistent efforts to implement political solutions that are the only hope for a just and lasting peace." *Adam Taylor, President, Sojourners*

"On this Ash Wednesday, we are called as Christians to grapple more fully with the ashes and annihilation happening in Gaza. Nearly 30,000 people have been killed, 65,000 injured – and thousands more are unaccounted for. Thousands of buildings have been turned to rubble – to ash. The scale and brutality of the death and destruction is simply overwhelming. God who weeps, who bleeds, who cries with and for us, especially for the innocent lives lost, hears our cries for a ceasefire, for peace, for justice, for restoration. Be with all those who are suffering in Gaza, in Israel, and across the region." *Rev. Michael Neuroth, Director, Washington DC Office of Public Policy & Advocacy, United Church of Christ*

"We mark ourselves with ashes outside of the White House to publicly recognize ourselves as sinners in need of changing our ways. Like most Americans, we desperately want President Biden to change course in his response to the Israel-Hamas war. Too many people have died in Gaza under bombs supplied by the United States, the majority of hostages are still held, and the conflict is only spreading in the region. We need President Biden to call for a ceasefire now and use all diplomatic tools available to make it happen." *Susan Gunn, Director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns*