

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Children of God”*

(Matthew 5:9)

Your Holiness Pope Francis,

We are deeply grateful for your repeated call for a ceasefire in our land. We come to you on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Gaza Strip, who are unable to share their stories of pain and suffering under the Israeli military occupation and aggressive assault on Gaza. We are urging your intervention to end the ongoing genocide and ethnic cleansing. We are approaching the Advent Season where Palestinians, Muslims and Christian alike, are preparing to celebrate the Prince of Peace. However, this year, our nation is mourning the loss of thousands of innocent lives. You have firmly asserted the need to end all wars, and affirmed the right of all people to live in peace.

For the last 47 days our people have been subjected to the worst deliberate aggression by one of the strongest militaries in the world with the most advanced war machines. Many reputable international human rights organizations have warned about war crimes being committed by the Israeli government. More than 13,000 civilians have been killed, including 5,600 children and 3,600 women. The number of injured civilians surpassed 27,500 and estimated more than 6,000 remain trapped under the rubble. Entire families were wiped out from the civil registry, and those surviving are severely impoverished and will probably be dealing with the trauma of this for years to come. The Israeli Minister of Defense stated that they prioritize “destruction over accuracy” which resulted in the destruction of infrastructure, hospitals, worship sites, UN schools which are all considered as places for safe refuge. 1.6 million Gazans have been internally displaced and made refugees again, as more than 70% of Gaza’s population consists of those who were ethnically cleansed from their homeland in 1948. The health system has already collapsed. Even places of worship have been targeted, and are no longer safe, including one of the churches where Christians and Muslims are sheltering.

For the past 16 years, Israel has turned Gaza into “a concentration camp”. It cut off water, electricity, and fuel, and denied the passage of urgent life-saving supplies into the Strip. Now Gaza had also become “a graveyard for thousands of children” according to a UNICEF Spokesperson, Mr. James Elder.

The Palestinian people, Muslims and Christians, have been abandoned and their suffering has gone unrecognized. The ongoing Israeli occupation constitutes an existential threat to the Palestinian Christian presence in the Holy Land, and

exacerbates any chances for forgiveness and reconciliation. We affirm that every human being is created in the image of God and are worthy of living a dignified life and “a life more abundant”. As Israel has continuously ignored many calls for a ceasefire, we believe that a more concrete action needs to be taken urgently in order for this genocide to stop. We are grateful for your insistence on a ceasefire. But our land needs more than prayers, calls, and statements. This is why we are convinced that an urgent visit to the Gaza Strip by your Holiness will bring an end to this genocide and will save the lives of many innocent people. We further envision that your visit will also mobilize governments to work with intentionality for a just peace which will bring about new hope and better future for Palestinians and Israelis alike, the entire region and the world.