



Geoff Crawford

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York delivered a joint Presidential Address to the General Synod in London today. Read the Archbishop of Canterbury's remarks on the situation in Israel and Gaza below. The Archbishop of York's remarks can be read [here](#).

Most of this Synod meeting, as you probably may be aware, will be focussed on 'living in love and faith' – Archbishop Stephen will talk to us about that in a moment, and I want to say now that I stand in complete agreement with all that he will say. Before that I want to reflect on what it means to be part of the global Church in a time of suffering, and particularly in a time when, as the Secretary General of the United Nations said on September the 19th at the general assembly, the world is like a door off its hinges.

The war in Ukraine has rocked the foundations of our presumed peace in Europe. Its effects continue to reverberate around the world, driving food insecurity in Africa and in many other parts of the world. Civil war is destroying communities and people in Sudan, South Sudan, Myanmar and so many other countries.

Lives have been devastated by flooding in Bangladesh and Libya, cyclones in North America, rising sea levels in the Pacific, famine in Madagascar, drought in South Sudan and across that region.

And of course, the devastating violence in Israel and Palestine is in all our hearts as we meet here today.

The barbaric slaughter of innocent Israelis by Hamas –the kidnapping of men, women and young children – has traumatised Israelis and Jewish people around the world, that was born in me most strongly in a visit to the Holy Land three weeks ago. The level of trauma was overwhelming.

It has re-awakened terrible memories, and sown fear for the future. As one father of someone killed said to me "I thought at least this was the one country in the world where we were safe".

In Jerusalem recently, I sat with an Israeli Jewish man who told me how members of his family, aged from three to elderly, had all been taken hostage by Hamas. No parent should ever lie awake at night wondering whether their child is still alive, whether they are being fed, whether they will hold them again. I renew my call for the release of all those held captive since 7th October.

And for the Palestinians of Gaza – who have already suffered for so long under Hamas rule, and Israeli occupation and blockade – life has descended into a living hell from which they can't escape. For all Palestinians, the conflict has reawakened fears of a second Nakba.

Israel's bombardment of Gaza on this unprecedented scale has killed thousands upon thousands of innocent people – including more than 4,000 children. No parent should ever have to write their child's name on their body, so they can be identified if they do not survive the next missile. No child should ever die with written on their body 'unknown'.

The siege has denied people food, water, medical treatment. The current levels of aid entering Gaza are utterly insufficient to meet the needs of

more than 2 million people. Doctors are now having to make the choice between who will be operated on without anaesthetic, and who will receive no treatment at all.

The suffering of innocent Palestinians cries out as a great wrong. As I have said before: the evils of Hamas cannot be paid by the civilians of Gaza.

Meanwhile the pressure on the West Bank is growing increasingly serious, and there is rising abuse, harassment and discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel. Settler violence from the illegal settlements under international law, apparently unchecked by Israel as the occupying power, will lead to another arena of unconstrained war unless Israel takes urgent steps to protect Palestinians.

I want to make clear that there is no equivalence between the atrocities of Hamas against Israeli civilians, and the right and duty of Israel to defend itself. I have emphasised that previously, and I do so again.

I also want to be clear that I do not believe that the devastating loss of civilian life and humanitarian catastrophe, resulting from Israel's bombardment and siege of Gaza, can be morally justified.

I think we need to be able to say both these things – in fact I think it is essential that we do.

International humanitarian law exists for a reason – to protect our common humanity in war. It is our shield against barbarity. All allegations of violations of international law need to be investigated by the relevant authorities.

But as a religious leader I can say that the killing of so many civilians, the extensive damage to civilian infrastructure cannot be morally justified.

When I visited Jerusalem, I joined the remarkable, extraordinary Christian leaders there, united as they never have been literally in their history, in calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. That was over three weeks ago. Thousands more innocent men, women and children in Gaza have been killed since then – while thousands in Israel still mourn those killed on the 7th October, and hundreds of families still plead for the release of their loved ones.

So I repeat that call again today with renewed urgency and even more force. This bloodshed must cease, hostages must be released, and aid must reach those in Gaza in dire need.

I do not have military or political answers to this crisis. I do not speak from those perspectives. But the call for a ceasefire is a moral cry that we are hearing from people of many faiths and none. Our common humanity must find another way to achieve justice, security and peaceful co-existence for Israelis and Palestinians from now, for the future. In Christ's name, we cry out from our hearts: "No More. The killing must stop."

This violence will not secure for the people of the Holy Land, the future they deserve and need. All the people of the Holy Land, Israeli and

Palestinian. We join the cries for another way to be found.

What do we do as the church in a time of war? Bishop Bell spoke of that in a remarkable essay in 1939. In times of war, the church must come back to its key calling to 'be the church'. It models an alternative way: the pattern of the Christ-life. Reconciled to God in Christ, we are a community of reconciliation and of non-violence.

This has been one of the humbling lessons for me as Archbishop of Canterbury: to visit Christians around the world who are witnessing and serving in the midst of conflict, poverty and persecution, as the church, truly the church. These are the martyrs, living or dead. Martyr in the strict sense of witness- witnessing today.

Churches read the Bible and teach a congregation under a tree in a refugee camp in Kenya. Worshippers receive the presence of Christ at a Eucharist in a cathedral in Sri Lanka still scarred by the 2019 Easter bombings.

Hymns and praises to God are sung in the South Sea Islands, alongside those bearing the brunt of climate change. Christians are at the forefront of peace-making in South Sudan.

This is part of what makes our formative story as Christians: the conviction that suffering does not have the last word. That even, perhaps especially, in the bleakest situations, the light and life of God is found in the beauty and miracles of resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

Here in the UK, the conflict in Israel and Palestine is prising people apart. Jewish people are experiencing the trauma of the biggest single loss of life in one day since the Shoah. They are a small global community and everyone knows someone killed or taken hostage on the 7th October.

Muslims, like Christians, feel a deep connection to the Holy Land. The sight of so many Palestinian civilians being killed, the majority of whom are Muslim, cuts deeply into the ties of the family of Islam. Christians in the UK also suffer particularly when our Palestinian sisters and brothers suffer in the occupied territories and in Israel itself. We can't and we won't ignore their pain.

The Church of England occupies a unique place in the ecology of churches and of faiths in this land. We have a divine calling to be a church each community and for each community, whether those we serve are Christians or not. That is the genius of the parish and the diocese, the chaplaincy and all those who minister, lay and ordained in every part of England. That calling looks different in each community and in every place and part of this country.

Often people are not looking for solutions from us. But we are called to love, to be present and to be alongside. To be faithful, to pray for our enemies, to proclaim the good news of Christ. These are the lessons of our sisters and brothers in the Caucasus, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and

Georgia, which I visited the week before 7th of October. In Manipur, in Gaza City, in Kiev, in Nigeria and so many other places.

While there are hateful voices stoking prejudice against anyone, for any reason, we cannot stand by. So we must rebuke those who are spreading vile antisemitic propaganda and harassing and attacking our Jewish neighbours. We must rebuke those who engage in hateful Islamophobic attacks and abuse against our Muslim neighbours.

Believing that every person, each person is made in the image of God means that we have a responsibility to both speak out against all such evils, and to live out against all such evils, and to play our part in building bridges across communities.

And the church must always pray. For when we pray, we are turning away from the delusion of self-sufficiency and saying that God is in fact in charge. As Karl Barth puts it : ‘To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.’ Prayer can put the world back on its hinges.

So Synod, please donate to the Gaza Appeal. Please walk alongside those from different communities. But more than anything else pray, please pray – for peace, for wisdom, for justice, for hope.☞

It is on the Cross, and from the empty tomb, that Jesus Christ won the battle against evil. It is in our willingness to be present to the suffering of the world that bitterness and brokenness can be transfigured, that peace can be pursued and the ultimate power of God to transform and redeem can be realised and known.☞

The Diocese of Jerusalem is a Church, a small church, that witnesses to Jesus Christ in times of great pain. The staff of Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza continue to this day to provide medical care despite enormous personal risk.

Programmes for women’s ministries are strengthening relationships and communities across the region. Ecumenical and interfaith engagement is fostering understanding and tolerance. All of this work – whether in Gaza, Israel, East Jerusalem or the West Bank, is keeping the hope of a just peace alive in these times of difficulty. Sisters and brothers, let us continue to stand with them in our Christian calling as justice-seekers, peacemakers, healers and bringers of Good News.

It’s my privilege now to introduce a message from Archbishop Hosam Naoum, recorded on Friday for us in Jerusalem. Let us listen to the words of someone who is witnessing to Christ amid such fear and uncertainty:

The Psalmist speaks to God in Psalm 39, ‘Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears.’

Hearing Archbishop Hosam speak to us from the holy city of the resurrection, we join with that prayer as their prayer.

With our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, we weep, we grieve, we lament and we protest. And we pray – for justice, for reconciliation, for hope, and for peace.

‘Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears.’ In the same Psalm, the Psalmist clings to God, who alone brings peace and justice: ‘And now, O Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.’

If you are comfortable standing, I invite, as many as can, now to stand in silent prayer for the people of Israel and Palestine, whether they be Christian, Jewish or Muslim, and for God’s church in the Holy Land for about two minutes.

[Read Archbishop Stephen's Presidential Address](#)

[Read more about Archbishop Hosam's video message to General Synod](#)

10 min read

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