

Statement by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Revd Justin Welby:

'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee' (Psalm 122)

Our grief and shock only grows greater as more devastating news and images emerge from the abhorrent terrorist attacks in Israel. The agonising suffering endured by those who were targeted and their families can scarcely be imagined. Our hearts are broken open by the grief of Israelis and our Jewish brothers and sisters around the world, for whom this trauma and loss stands in the dark and terrible shadow of the worst days of their history.

I beg that those who have been taken hostage are set free into safety, that they and their loved ones might be released from the horror of their captivity. The anger felt by the people of Israel at the cruelty they have experienced is entirely justified. Many around the world share in that anger.

But in the face of a ground offensive in Gaza, I plead that the sins of Hamas are not borne by the citizens of Gaza, who themselves have faced such suffering over many decades. The price of evil cannot be paid by the innocent. Civilians cannot bear the costs of terrorists. International humanitarian law recognises that, for the sake of everyone's humanity, some acts can never be permissible in the chaos of warfare. I pray that Israel does everything it can to limit the harm caused to innocent civilians.

Over two million civilians in Gaza, half of them children, are facing a catastrophe. A humanitarian corridor and convoy are needed as rapidly as possible, as set out in the Geneva Conventions. I pray particularly for the Anglican-run Ahli Arab Hospital and all those caring for the injured, who need medical supplies and generator fuel.

I join with the US Secretary of State and others in urging the Israeli government to exercise their right of defence with the wisdom that might break the cycles of violence under which generations have struggled. Amidst the chaos and confusion of war, and as much as is possible, I join the calls for Israel's military response to be proportional and to discriminate between civilians and Hamas.

Pray for the people of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. Pray for the future of the Holy Land. Pray for those who will weep, and fear, and die tonight.

Lord God, we pray, by your great mercy, defend your children from all perils and dangers of this night.

If you are able, please support the JMECA appeal for the Ahli Arab Hospital to continue providing life-saving medical care: www.jmecca.org.uk/get-involved/donate/current-appeals-0/al-ahli-hospital-gaza-appeal

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