

Statement of Pope Benedict XVI, July 20, 2006

POPE CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE CEASE-FIRE, NEGOTIATIONS IN MIDDLE EAST

VATICAN CITY ([CNS](#)) -- Pope Benedict XVI called for an immediate cease-fire to be followed by "reasonable and responsible negotiations" in the Middle East.

The pope's repeated appeal for peace in the region came as Israeli soldiers began fighting Hezbollah militants inside Lebanon's borders.

A statement issued July 20 by the Vatican press office said the pope also declared July 23 to be a day dedicated to prayers and penance for people of all religious faiths "to implore God for the precious gift of peace."

The statement said the pope urged prayers for "an immediate cease-fire between the (warring) sides," the establishment of "a humanitarian corridor in order to bring aid to the suffering people," and the start of "reasonable and responsible negotiations so as to end the objective situations of injustice existing in that region."

"The Lebanese have the right to see the integrity and sovereignty of their country respected, the Israelis have the right to live in peace in their nation, and the Palestinians have the right to have a free and sovereign country," the written statement said.

The pope also launched an appeal to all charitable aid organizations to direct their attention to the people "hit by this ruthless conflict," the statement said.

Nine days of fighting, which began July 12 after Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers, left 29 Israelis dead, including 15 civilians killed by rockets launched by Hezbollah fighters into Israel. Israel's daily air strikes on Lebanon have left some 300 people dead, 1,000 injured, and 500,000 people displaced.

Israel began attacking Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank in June after an Israeli soldier was kidnapped by the militant group Hamas. About 100 Palestinians -- half of them civilians -- have been killed in those attacks.

Meanwhile, the United Nations warned there would be a humanitarian catastrophe without a cease-fire to let aid agencies take relief to areas affected by the Israeli bombing campaign.

Statement of Pope Benedict XVI, June 30, 2006

I am following events in the Holy Land with concern and I pray that all those who have been abducted may soon be returned to their loved ones.

I appeal to Israeli and Palestinian leaders that, with the generous help of the international community, they may seek responsibly for that negotiated end to the conflict, which alone can ensure the peace to which their people aspire.

Statement of Patriarchs and Heads of Local Churches in Jerusalem July 7, 2006

STOP ALL THE VIOLENCE, PURSUE A JUST PEACE

"Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands at a distance; for truth stumbles in the public square, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and whoever turns from evil is despoiled. The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene".

(Isaiah 59: 14 – 16)

The violence and aggression of this present moment is without proportion or justification. An Israeli soldier was taken prisoner in a combat. A Jewish settler was kidnapped and killed. As Israeli response, three bridges were destroyed and a power substation was disabled causing tens of millions of dollars of damage and leaving up to 750,000 people without electricity or water in Gaza. Moreover, the Israeli forces have abducted 84 persons, among them 7 Cabinet Ministers and 21 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. This comes after a week in which 48 Palestinians were killed and among the dead were 27 innocent civilians, including nine children and a pregnant woman.

To-day, we Christian heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, we say: it is against law and reason what is still happening in our land. It is our duty as religious leaders to keep saying this to our Authorities. It is against law and reason that you remain and you keep us on the ways of death. *"The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene. (Isaiah 59: 16)*

We condemn the abduction of the Israeli soldier, the killing of the settler youth, as we condemn the daily abduction and killing of tens of Palestinians as well as the keeping of thousands of them in prisons. All human beings, Israelis and Palestinians, have the same dignity and must be equally treated. All aggression against human dignity, whether Israeli or Palestinian, must stop.

Our sufferings, Israelis and Palestinians, will have an end when the truth on both sides is recognized. The right for Israel to have security must be recognized. At the same time, must be recognized that the core of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is the deprivation of the Palestinian people of his freedom. We firmly support fighting against terrorism, but we remind firmly that this fighting starts by eradicating the roots of all violence, which is the deprivation of the Palestinian people of his freedom.

It is against law and reason to keep going in the way of death. The moral imperative is clear. Stop all the violence. Stop the killing. Protect the life and dignity of the people. Begin negotiations. Break this murderous chain of violence in which we are ensnared. And listen to God's call : *"Depart from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it "*
(Psalm 33:15)

Things have gone too far. We call on the International community to intervene and insist on a diplomatic solution to this conflict. All Authorities must change course, and with unflinching International pressure and presence, they have to negotiate in order to reach the just and definitive peace. "***What does the Lord require of you...To do Justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God***" (Micah 6:8).

- + *Patriarch Theophilos III*: Greek Orthodox Patriarchate
- + *Patriarch Michel Sabbah*: Latin Patriarchate.
- + *Patriarch Torkom II*: Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate.
- Rev Pier Battista Pizziballa*, ofm, Custos of the Holy Land
- + *Anba Abraham*: Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate.
- + *Swerios Malki Mourad*: Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate.
- + *Abune Grima*: Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate

- + *Paul Nabil Sayyah*: Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate.
- + *Bishop Riah Abu Al-Assal*: Episcopal Church of Jerusalem & the Middle East.
- + *Bishop Mounib Younan*: Lutheran Evangelical Church.
- + *Pierre Malki*: Exarch for the Syrian Catholics - Jerusalem
- + *George Bakar*: Greek Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate
- Rev Rafael Minassian*: Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate.

Holy See Appeals for Dialogue in Middle East

VATICAN CITY, JULY 14, 2006 (Zenit.org).- Given the crisis unleashed in recent days in the Middle East, the Holy See condemns both the terrorist attacks and the military reprisals, and appeals for sincere dialogue.

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Vatican secretary of state, made a statement on Vatican Radio, which was fully transcribed and published in Italian by the Vatican press office.

"The news we are receiving from the Middle East is certainly worrying," he said.

Cardinal Sodano confirmed that Benedict XVI -- who is spending a few days of rest in the Italian Alps -- "and all his collaborators are following with great attention the latest dramatic episodes, which risk degenerating into a conflict with international repercussions."

"As in the past, the Holy See also condemns both the terrorist attacks on the one side and the military reprisals on the other. Indeed, a state's right to self-defense does not exempt it from respecting the norms of international law, especially as regards the protection of civilian populations," Cardinal Sodano said.

"In particular, the Holy See deplores the attack on Lebanon, a free and sovereign nation, and gives assurances of its closeness to those people who have suffered so much in the defense of their own independence," he continued.

"Once again," he said, "it appears obvious that the only path worthy of our civilization is that of sincere dialogue between the contending parties."

Statement of Pope Benedict XVI, July 16, 2006

In recent days the news from the Holy Land is a reason for new and grave concern for all, in particular because of the spread of warlike actions also in Lebanon, and because of the numerous victims among the civilian population. At the origin of these cruel oppositions there are, sadly, objective situations of violation of law and justice. But neither terrorist acts nor reprisals, especially when they entail tragic consequences for the civilian population, can be justified. By such paths, as bitter experiences shows, positive results are not achieved.

This day is dedicated to the Virgin of Carmel, Mount of the Holy Land that, a few kilometers from Lebanon, dominates the Israeli city of Haifa, the latter also recently hit. Let us pray to Mary, Queen of Peace, to implore from God the fundamental gift of concord, bringing political leaders back to the path of reason, and opening new possibilities of dialogue and agreement. In this perspective I invite the local Churches to raise special prayers for peace in the Holy Land and in the whole of the Middle East.

Letter of Bishop Skylstad to Patriarch Sabbah, July 14, 2006

Your Beatitude:

The tragic and escalating violence in the Holy Land is of profound concern to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. On behalf of our Conference, I want to express our fraternal solidarity with you as you lead and serve your people at this difficult time.

In a particular way we are deeply distressed by the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. We reject all acts of violence and terror, especially those that target civilians on both sides of the dispute and that destroy the infrastructure that serves the civilian population.

Our Conference supports your leadership in rejecting the path of violence and in calling for the negotiation of a just peace that provides security for Israelis and a viable state for Palestinians. The cycle of violence must be broken in order to open up the path to justice and peace in the Holy Land. Please be assured of our continuing prayers as you comfort your people and seek a just peace.