



THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
EAGLAIS NA h-ALBA

Dear Sir,

I regret very much the excessive force used by the Israeli military to punish the leadership in Gaza for the recent shelling of Ashdod in Israel and I am deeply concerned by the reports which our Church is receiving from our partners on the ground.

Dr Bernard Sabella, who was a delegate at the last Church of Scotland General Assembly, has written from Jerusalem: "The situation in Gaza is absolutely disastrous.... The borders remain closed and the bombardments are inflicting civilian casualties. As a result, Gaza is in a most deplorable humanitarian situation as the Israeli air strikes have devastated the governmental and civil society infrastructure such as universities, mosques and other localities where civilians usually congregate. The targeting of individual homes raises concern that civilians would be hurt and entire families would be wiped out. We are deeply concerned about these developments and we are praying and hoping that the Israeli air strikes and naval bombardments would come to a close immediately. Powers and States need to put pressure on the Israeli government to get it to take the decision to stop this awful situation in which hundreds of Palestinians are falling victims, not to speak of the social and psychological scars left by this conflict."

The casualties reported as a result of the Palestinian shelling may be relatively few, but it too must stop. The death toll in Gaza is already around 300, with over 1000 casualties. The shelling appears as futile as a pin-prick against a machete.

As Bishop Suheil Dawani, the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, stated yesterday: "Of immediate concern is the urgent medical services needed by the victims of this violence. The immensity of providing care for the injured and wounded is overwhelming a healthcare system struggling to provide essential healthcare services for 1.5 million Palestinians, most of who live in refugee camps." We are proud that our partner the Al Ahli Arab Hospital, with its many Scottish connections, continues to offer medical care to all who need it, continuing a commitment, which has been unbroken for more than a century, to the well being and peace of the community in Gaza City.

The stakes are high in this tinderbox region, in which the Abrahamic faiths all have a rightful interest. Would there be any willingness for faith leaders to talk together to see if there is no common ground, no way to shared goals, no possibility of living together, no path to peace? 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit' says the Lord through the prophet Zechariah.

Governments have their responsibilities and today I have written to Israeli Ambassador Ron Proser and our own Foreign Secretary David Milliband to urge a peaceful approach to resolving the crisis. I also call on the governments of the EU, the USA, and the Arab states to use what moral influence they have to restrain. The problem has become too big for the Israelis and

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Palestinians to solve themselves, and now is the time for the UN to unite the nations, and for the religions of the world to demonstrate the nature of the God we believe in.

For church members and all people of good will this is the time to write to their MPs and to the Prime Minister, and to make this whole dreadful business a matter for sustained prayer, in the name of the one who has come among us as the Prince of Peace.

As Dr Sabella concludes: "The conflict in Gaza and in fact in Israel and Palestine cannot and will not be resolved by force. Only the victims pay the price and politicians are left to weigh the advantages to their positions, especially at the eve of upcoming Israeli elections. In the long run, however, what is right is right, and violence will not move us in this land towards an acceptable end of conflict."

Rt Rev David Lunan
Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland