



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
9th Special session

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Joint Oral Statement

**Caritas Internationalis, Dominicans for Justice and Peace (Order of Preachers),
International Young Catholic Students on peace-building, Pax Romana**

**“The Grave Violations of Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory including
the recent aggression of the occupied Gaza Strip”**

Mr. President,

We express our deep concern on the current crisis in the Gaza Strip which is worsening the already dramatic human rights and humanitarian situation for most innocent civilians.

The huge number of civilian deaths and casualties has led to a tragic level of suffering for the whole population. Since the beginning of the offensive on 27th December - according OCHA’s Situation report issued on the 7th of January 2009 - at least 683 Palestinians have been killed and approximately 3085¹ injured by the Israeli attacks, including children and women. On the same day, there was an intensification of military activity that has left more innocent civilians dead or wounded. Hamas continues to fire rockets and mortar shells into Israel resulting in moderate to light injuries and in one more IDF soldier’s death.² Many more civilians will be killed if the hostilities continue.

Caritas Jerusalem³, which makes services available to people of diverse ethnicities and faith communities, living both in Palestine and in Israel, reports that its humanitarian programmes and medical relief operations in Gaza have been seriously affected since the beginning of the bombing. This organization provides basic primary health care services to the Palestinian population through a main medical centre, a mobile clinic and six medical points. Although

¹United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Situation Report from the Humanitarian Coordinator, 07 January 2009.

²United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Situation Report from the Humanitarian Coordinator, 08 January 2009.

³Caritas Internationalis is the umbrella organization for 162 national Catholic charities and Caritas Jerusalem is the national Caritas member in the Holy Land.

its work continues, any movement inside Gaza has become dangerous because of Israeli bombing and attacks.

Israeli military operation comes on top of a growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Furthermore the Israeli closure of borders resulted in an acute lack of food and basic medical supplies such as antiseptics and antibiotics. According to Caritas Jerusalem, the medical services in Gaza are unable to cope with the wounded and the Caritas medical centre in Al Shati Camp in Gaza City is difficult to access for many people because of the attacks. Though the critical situation, over the past few days, the Caritas mobile clinic has treated 150 patients for minor sickness at UN schools and seven people wounded in the attacks. Also, the six Caritas clinics in remote areas of Gaza Strip remains still operational, each providing primary health care services to 1,500 people per medical point⁴ and sharing supplies with local hospitals.⁵

“War cannot be justified either by Israel or by Hamas” said Caritas President Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga.⁶ An immediate permanent ceasefire is vital to get humanitarian relief into Gaza and to protect human life: the three hours ceasefire is a first step, but it's not enough to deliver the required humanitarian assistance to everyone.

We thus strongly condemn the human rights violations perpetrated by both sides and call on the Council to:

- Urge all parties involved to commit themselves to an immediate permanent ceasefire and to ensure free access to the area for humanitarian assistance;
- Urge all parties to protect the lives of civilians and to enforce International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.
- Urge Israeli authority, according to the Fourth Geneva Convention, to end the indiscriminate collective punishment of the civilian population and also urge to immediately terminate the excessive use of force;
- Urge Hamas to end their unlawful rocket attacks on civilians in Israel;
- Urge the international community to use all its influence to ensure an effective protection of civilian populations, especially the most vulnerable in accordance with the International law and facilitate all discussion leading to a just and longstanding solution;
- Request relevant mechanisms of the Human Rights Council to investigate and to assess the human rights violations and the humanitarian situation.

Thank you Mr. President

⁴See Caritas Internationalis Press release “Ceasefire vital to get humanitarian relief into Gaza”, Caritas Internationalis, 29 December 2008.

http://www.caritas.org/newsroom/press_releases/ceasefire_vital_to_get_humanitarian_relief_into_gaza.html

⁵See Caritas Internationalis’ Press release “A look at Caritas in Gaza: Questions and Answers”, 8 January 2009.

<http://www.caritas.org/activities/emergencies/OAonGaza.html>

⁶See Press release “President of Caritas Internationalis calls for Gaza cease-fire”, Catholic, News Service, 6 January 2009.

http://www.caritas.org/newsroom/press_releases/caritas_president_cardinal_rodriguez_gaza_ceasefire_vital_to_get_help_to_injured.html

See also the Pope’s speech (7 January 2009) to the accredited diplomats to the Holy See in which he appealed for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and the resumption of negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, with the support of the international community <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/ens/0900081.htm>