



*I will never tire of reiterating my call, addressed in particular to those who have political responsibility: stop the bombs and missiles now, end hostile stances [everywhere]. ... A global cease-fire is urgent: either we do not realize it or we are pretending not to see that we are on the brink of the abyss.*

—Pope Francis, [interview with La Stampa](#), 29 January 2024

## **Background** (updated from our Action Alert sent 2/23/2024)

We are heartbroken by the ongoing violence in Israel and Gaza. We deeply mourn the loss of all lives and pray for those who have lost loved ones in this war. We unequivocally condemn Hamas's attacks and inhumane treatment of civilians and call for the release of all hostages. We also condemn the indiscriminate and violent Israeli response that has claimed the life of over 30,000 people and call for the release of all administrative detainees.

The Israeli government has restricted food, fuel, and humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip, people, including young infants and children, have begun to die of starvation and the U.N. is warning of a looming famine. This is a critical moment. Israel has set a deadline of March 10, the beginning of Ramadan, after which they will pursue a full invasion of Rafah if all the hostages are not released. Members of the House of Representatives are especially important, as they may soon be voting to send more weapons to Israel to enable this ongoing genocide.

There is currently no safe place in Gaza, as Israeli forces have been bombing and invading all the places that were designated as safe areas for relocation. In the West Bank, Israel has carried out near daily military raids, settler violence has increased, and 380 Palestinians have been killed there and over 3000 taken as prisoners to Israeli jails. Many

of these prisoners are not charged with any crime but simply held as “administrative detainees”.

This conflict did not begin on October 7<sup>th</sup>. It has deep roots, and the security of people in Israel is inextricably tied to justice for the people of Palestine.

Watch this powerful [February 18 talk in London](#) by the Rev. Munther Isaac, a prophet in the spirit of Oscar Romero and the Palestinian Lutheran pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem.

More war and weapons won't bring peace. In the face of growing violence, lawmakers must:

- Publicly call for a permanent ceasefire to prevent further loss of life;
- Prioritize the protection of all civilians by urgently permitting humanitarian aid into Gaza, fully funding UNRWA (the U.N. agency supporting Palestinian refugees) and other aid operations, and working to secure the release of Israeli hostages as well as Palestinian administrative detainees in Israeli jails;
- Prohibit the transfer of more weapons and military assistance to Israel;
- Work diplomatically to support regional de-escalation across the Middle East; and
- Urge all parties to fully respect international humanitarian law.

For additional background information, see these articles:

[Sisters of Mercy leaders condemn violence, call for peace in Israel and Gaza](#)

The October, November, January, and February editions of our Mercy [Critical Considerations](#)

[The Stones Cry Out delegation report](#) from Pax Christi USA

An [NCR report](#) on Pope Francis' call for a ceasefire