



Press release – for immediate release, 19 November 2012

Christian development and peace groups call on Europe to act urgently against new escalation of Gaza violence

(Brussels, 19/11/2012). Three international Christian development and peace groups call on the EU and its Member States to use their influence for a ceasefire in Gaza and Southern Israel, where escalating violence is once again putting civilians at risk. Four years after “Operation Cast Lead”, Israel has announced the launch of a new military operation against Gaza, following the Israeli air force’s assassination of a Hamas leader and the firing of rockets into southern Israel by Gaza militants.

The APRODEV network of development organisations related to the World Council of Churches, the CIDSE alliance of Catholic development agencies, and the Catholic peace movement Pax Christi International, call upon Europe to take urgent action.

“History must not be allowed to repeat itself. We call on the EU and its Member States to work urgently towards a ceasefire, and respect for international humanitarian law by all parties,” CIDSE Secretary General **Bernd Nilles** said. CIDSE works with Palestinian and Israeli partner organizations via several of its members.

The Christian development and peace groups say the use of force will not bring justice, peace or security for Palestinians or Israelis in the long-term. They also call for an end to the illegal closure of Gaza, which is standing in the way of a just solution.

“The EU and its Member States must exert their influence towards an immediate end to the violence, and a just peace based on international law which addresses the roots of the conflict,” APRODEV General Secretary **Rob van Drimmelen** said.

Amid the trauma and damage caused by the 2008 – 2009 war, the people of Gaza have been trying to rebuild and recover, even as the Israeli closure continues to cut them off from the West Bank and largely isolate them from the world.

The current escalation has resulted in the deaths of 29 Palestinian and 3 Israeli civilians. Over the past four years, 271 Palestinians and 4 Israelis have been killed by ongoing military operations in and around Gaza. Gaza is still considered occupied, and remains under a five year-long Israeli closure, which primarily affects civilians and is contrary to international humanitarian law.

Jan Willems, artistic director of Theatre Day Productions (TDP), a partner organization of CIDSE members, recounts the start of the current escalation last Wednesday: *“Following a discussion with the audience at the opening of our new play *The Cooks (Al Tabakhi’in)*, the first bombs fell and we had to evacuate children, teachers and staff from the theatre. A building full of people, all scared. Luckily everyone made it home safely. Life in Gaza has stopped, again. We wait for the bombing to stop, again.”*

Raji Sourani, Director of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights in Gaza, emphasizes the responsibility of the EU: *“The international community’s task is not to wait until crimes happen, but to act to prevent them from happening. If the EU doesn’t use its influence to end the violence now, I believe the worst is yet to come.”*

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Notes to the editors:

- **CIDSE** is an international alliance of Catholic development agencies. Its members share a common strategy in their efforts to eradicate poverty and establish global justice. The members of the Working Group on Palestine/Israel – Broederlijk Delen, CAFOD, CCFD, Cordaid, Misereor and Trócaire – are actively involved in the region through partners in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Together with our local partners, we work to reduce poverty and build peace through development and humanitarian programmes. www.cidse.org
- **APRODEV** is the Association of World Council of Churches related Development Organisations in Europe. The members of the APRODEV Middle East Working Group share a vision of peaceful co-existence in the Middle East with their partners in Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories. This begins with a respect for international law, and deepens with a rights-based recognition of the need for security-for-all.
- **Pax Christi International** is a non-profit, non-governmental Catholic peace movement working on a global scale on a wide variety of issues in the fields of human rights, human security, disarmament and demilitarisation, just world order and religion and violent conflict. www.paxchristi.net
- The escalation in Gaza comes in the context of the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, with 1,600 new housing units recently announced by Prime Minister Netanyahu, a large increase in Israeli demolitions of West Bank Palestinian structures, and plans to displace thousands of West Bank and Negev Bedouin. It also follows Israeli threats to topple the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority if the upcoming bid for Palestine to be recognized as a UN non-member State succeeds.
- [Statistics on casualties since Cast Lead, before the current escalation](#) and [Information on casualties in the current escalation](#). More information on civilian casualties can be found at www.pchrgaza.org and www.btselem.org.

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