

AN EASTER REFLECTION ON THE ONGOING CONFLICT IN THE HOLY LAND

Bishop Nicholas Hudson, Chair of the International Affairs department of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, offered this reflection on the Holy Land during Holy Week..

In this holiest of weeks, our hearts turn naturally to the Holy Land, the land in which Christ died and rose for the redemption of humankind. Our hearts are deeply saddened to witness the immense suffering borne still by so many of its inhabitants.

Of the 251 Israelis taken hostage in the 7 October Hamas attack, 59 remain unaccounted for. Of these, just 24 are believed to be alive. We hold firmly in our prayers their relatives and all who mourn these dead hostages. We hold just as firmly in our prayers the families of the tens of thousands of Palestinians - countless women and children among them - killed by the ensuing disproportionate bombardment. It is with profound distress that we witness the continuing suffering of countless innocent civilians. We pray the Spirit released by Christ on the evening that he rose from the dead (cf. John 20, 22) might be released anew in these lands to bestow on them the just peace for which so many of its inhabitants yearn.

We are profoundly concerned that, despite extensive multilateral efforts to secure a lasting ceasefire and bring an end to hostilities, there remains no sign of peace. Pope Francis constantly reminds us: "*War is a human defeat. War does not solve problems; war is evil; war destroys.*" (Pope Francis, General Audience, 4 December 2024) Peace benefits all; it is a sign of God's kingdom on earth and enables us all to flourish.

We call on the international community to recognise that all the people of these lands have the right to live in safety and peace. These are not mere aspirations - they are inalienable rights grounded in the dignity of every person; rights that must be upheld. We particularly pray for the West Bank Christians and their neighbours, where many are deeply fearful for their future, as they see their homes encircled by new and rapidly expanding settlements and their freedom of movement drastically restricted.

In his Lenten message, Cardinal Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, reminds us that hope is the daughter of faith. It is with hope in our hearts that we sing at our Easter Vigil, "*at night there are tears but joy comes with dawn*" (Psalm 30): as Christ's body is laid in the earth, we await with hope his Resurrection from the dead. Our heartfelt prayer this Holy Week is that there rise up in these lands a renewed desire and yearning on all sides for the cessation of hostilities and the finding of ways to a just peace which honours the humanity redeemed by Christ.