

30 October 2023

Prot. # 331/2023

Reference: Tragic Events in Gaza

Dear Friends,

I am sure you are following the tragic news out of Gaza and the emerging human made humanitarian catastrophe that is developing. The needs are great and growing. As of yesterday, we had 550 members of the 1,000 strong Christian community who took refuge at our Holy Family complex there which includes the Church, parish halls and facilities, three convents, a school, and the special needs homes run by the Daughters of Charity sisters where 80 people who are immobile are in residence. The responsibility to care for their daily needs since the beginning of the war three weeks ago has been a great responsibility, not to mention extending the generosity to the over 200 Christians who took refuge at the nearby Greek Orthodox Church complex. We felt that was a huge responsibility without adding to the burden.

Ten days ago, shelling in the vicinity of the Greek Orthodox St. Porphyrios Church led to the collapse of a two-story building at the entrance of the complex where tens of our people have taken refuge. There are 18 confirmed deaths of innocent, women, children and this represents 1.8% of the Christian community there. A huge loss to any community by any standard. No Christian family was not impacted in this vicious attack! The human stories are incredibly tragic, and I am truly shaken as I personally know many of them from my frequent visits along with His Beatitude and whom we visited in their homes, shared a meal with them, or simply listened to their challenges! Some are participants in the LPJ job creation program, while others are employees of some of our sister Catholic agencies working in Gaza.

As a result of this tragedy and given the reduced space available at the Greek Orthodox complex, many have relocated to our already filled to capacity complex. At some point, we had to appeal to our friends in Gaza to provide tents to be set up in the courtyard and playgrounds to accommodate their needs. We are simply overwhelmed, and the means available to us are being depleted quickly and I appeal for help from our friends to alleviate the suffering of their brothers and sisters in Gaza.

While we all know what we need to do when the hostilities end based on several previous war experiences, at the present time, it is impossible to quantify during a time of active war while the destruction and human loss is on the rise. Below is a partial list of what the great post war needs will be in broad terms:

1. Psychosocial programs for the parish and the schools.
2. Fixing damages that will arise in our immediate institutions:
 - a. Zeitoun location: Church, parish facilities, school, Daughters of Charity homes
 - b. Remal – Holy Family School
 - c. Al-Shate Refugee camp – Thomas Aquinas Center
3. Fixing damages to homes of Christian families partially / severely destroyed

4. Rental support for maybe 6 months to 1 year for families whose homes were completely destroyed.
5. Cash support to families in desperate need to rebuild their lives.
6. Food and hygiene packages to families.

Although our attention is focused on Gaza at the present time, part of our future intervention will have to take into consideration the grave needs developing on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem where the fragmentation of the West Bank and confining people to their immediate area of residence means that jobs in Israel are lost and given the war conditions all jobs in the tourism sector are lost. Unemployment will rise dramatically and so will humanitarian suffering for a long time to come. Alternate livelihood support and empowerment programs will be devised to help our people cope so they do not consider emigration. Needless to say, we should also consider the growing needs of the Migrants and Asylum Seekers. However, at the present time, first things first!

Our immediate needs are to sustain those who are under our care during this active war and maintain their dignity. Given the gravity of the needs and after the blessing of His Beatitude Cardinal Pizzaballa, I appeal to you and through you to your generous donors to support us in this time of great need. Any donation, regardless of its size will be most appreciated. At the present time and to bypass bureaucratic procedures, any emergency funds received will be fully utilized for the Gaza emergency and will be reported on with full transparency. Many thanks in advance. You will be blessed abundantly for your generosity.

Sincerely,

Sami El-Yousef
Chief Executive Officer