



Status Update on Situation in the Holy Land – January 2024

General Situation – Gaza

The general situation in Gaza continues to be very dire with no end in sight. Here are a few facts published by the UN agencies: 85% of the population (1.9 M people) are internally displaced; 2.2 M people at risk of famine; 24,000 people killed 70% of whom are children and women; 60,500 people injured also 70% women and children; 60% of all housing units destroyed or severely damaged; Only 15 hospitals out of 36 are partially functioning; 69% of all schools destroyed; 625,000 students denied an education; other professionals killed include 146 UN staff, 337 health professionals, and 117 journalists; zero electricity or clean water; telecommunication network destroyed; and only 100-200 humanitarian aid trucks delivered (except for north Gaza) compared to 600 trucks daily before the war.

Situation of the Christian Community in Gaza

There are 600 people taking refuge at the Holy Family Church complex who are completely dependent on us for food, water, medicines, clothing, and all their daily needs. Today, the biggest shortage is medicines! Additionally, we provide the same support to the 200 Christians taking refuge at the Greek Orthodox Church complex, plus dozens of Moslem families who are our immediate neighbors. They have limited supplies and now the additional supplies are only available on the black market at prices that are no less than 10 times their normal prices. Thus, the cost of maintaining them has exponentially increased in recent weeks. Additionally, there are six people who have different levels of injuries that require further medical attention and so far, that has not been possible. Damage to the Daughters of Charity children's home where 55 children continue to be in our care is extensive and so far is impossible to fix.

There has also been extensive damage to our properties in Gaza including extensive damage to the Holy Family School in Remal from shelling and from the wear and tear of being used as a shelter. At the peak, there were 2,500 people taking shelter there and at the present time there are 900 people. The Thomas Aquinas Center sustained a direct hit and requires extensive restoration and so is the case for the adjacent Caritas Medical Center. The Rosary Sisters School also sustained major damages as a result of multiple direct hits as well as its use as a temporary command center for the Israeli army while they were in the area.

LPJ Intervention - Gaza

Since the first day of the war, the intervention in Gaza has been to do the impossible to ensure that those within the Christian community plus our neighbors receive their daily needs to the extent humanly possible. We did not spare any effort to get the resources there, whether cash or supplies to ensure the survival of our brothers and sisters there. This has been a huge task, but we thank God that we succeeded, event at times of extreme danger. Additionally, we have lobbied with available networks on all sides to advocate for the physical safety of our properties there and by default those who took refuge there. This should not be underestimated given the huge challenges on all sides. Major financial resources have been invested so far given the extended nature of the war (already over 100 days) and we will spare no effort to continue to do this through the end of the war and beyond. Once the fighting ends, and some resolution is in the horizon, plans will have to be put in place to rebuild and re-establish our institutions, plus possible offer other services that may be critically needed.

General Situation on the West Bank

The general situation on the West Bank continues to be very dire with no end in sight. Here are a few facts published by the UN agencies: 340 Palestinians killed since the beginning of the war including 88 children; 4,197 were injured including 635 children; 413 violent settler attacks; 1,208 people including 586 children displaced from their homes. In addition, there are several additional factors that complicates life dramatically on the West Bank: the total closure and fragmentation of the West Bank deeming travel extremely dangerous; the total collapse of the tourism sector causing major loss of employment mostly affecting Bethlehem and Jerusalem; cancellation of all work permits of Palestinians to work in Israel disrupting the lives of some 100,000 such workers; suspension of tax revenue transfers from Israel to the Palestinian Authority deeming it practically bankrupt and thus about 180,000 civil servants have not received a salary since October 2023. This has transformed the West Bank into an insecure area due to the daily Israeli army incursions and destruction to infrastructure such raids result in, and an area facing severe unemployment and economic hardship.

Situation of the Christian Community on West Bank

There has not been any area on the West Bank that has not been affected by the ongoing war ranging for the tourism sector in Bethlehem district and Jerusalem; suspension of permits in the northern areas such as Zababdeh and Aboud and other areas; and loss of income for public servants including in Ramallah and the surrounding villages. Thousands have been affected and no one was spared.

LPJ Intervention

On the West Bank, the focus during November and December has been on pure humanitarian support. Well over 5,000 people have been supported through our various interventions including food coupons; support to cover rentals, medicine and medical costs, utility bills, education support, and other obligations. Our focus is already now turning attention to more sustainable solutions such as job creation; small business development and income generation possibilities, internships, and vocational training. We expect that hundreds will participate in the coming 4-5 months and benefit from such possibilities. Additionally, we will also keep pure humanitarian support to the other families that will continue to be in serious need.

Funds received from the members of the Order through the various Lieutenancies as well as other donations have been utilized during the months of November and December 2023 to support the daily needs of approximately one thousand people in Gaza and roughly 5,000 people on the West Bank. During the coming 4-5 months, we shall continue to do the humanitarian support and gradually shift to more sustainable job and income generation. Once the war ends, funds will be utilized to help people regain their lives in Gaza as well as dedicate some funds to fix damages and re-establish the work of the institutions. Needless to say, also some funds will be dedicated to implementing psychosocial interventions through the parish and the schools to help people get over the trauma they experienced. Concrete plans for Gaza will need to be put on hold until the day after.

Our appreciation and heartfelt gratitude go to every single member of the Order who made generous contributions to enable us to deal with the horrors of this evil war. Thank you and God bless! Additionally, our appreciation goes to the Grand Master Cardinal Filoni, the Governor General Ambassador Leonardo Visconti, and Mr. Francois Vayne for their courageous solidarity visit immediately after Christmas. It meant the world to everyone they encountered during their visit!



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