

As the Situation in Gaza Worsens

Dr. Bernard Sabella

Executive Secretary

Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees

Middle East Council of Churches

Jerusalem

Dear All,

As the situation in Gaza worsens, as OCHA Update on Gaza on July 18, 2014 shows. And as over 300 of our Palestinian people are killed and 2300 injured, 80% of whom are civilians; women and children in particular. And as over 1900 homes are either completely destroyed or severely damaged. And as over 50,000 Palestinians are displaced. And as over 52,000 children are in need of Psychosocial Support and their numbers are growing by the hour. And as electricity and sewage infrastructure are damaged. And as 13 primary health centers are closed and 84 schools are damaged by shelling. And as over 40,000 Palestinians are dependent on food assistance. And as...and as...

Allow me to thank each and every one who seeks to offer or is actually offering assistance. BUT most important than assistance is the need to convince the Israelis, especially the politicians, that the only way out is through making PEACE with us, Palestinians. This current tragic situation is a déjà vu situation and it will be replicated in the future. And as Constantine Dabbagh, the veteran retired Executive Director of DSPR Gaza, said that even if Israel succeeds in whatever it is doing, without a peaceful solution the alternate to Hamas is the rise of groups that would be more bent on confrontation rather than on a political solution to the conflict. The core issue is that of Justice, and both Constantine and Issa Tarazi, the Executive Director of DSPR Gaza insist on that. It is not logical or understandable that Western governments ignore JUSTICE as they deal with the immediate situation and overwhelmingly support Israel and its actions against Gaza. These governments chose to ignore the fact that Gaza has been under siege for over 12 years now with enormous costs to its population. And what did these governments offer for the people of Gaza except selective financial support, like morphine shots to a chronically ill person? Where is the moral power of the West? Or is this only applicable when it is suitable or profitable? Where is the determination of the Western governments, especially those so much in support of the government of Israel in whatever it decides, politically and militarily, in pointing out to their Israeli patrons and friends that without a genuine, fair and just political solution, Israel will continuously be embroiled in Gaza déjà vu situations?

Talking to Dr. Issa Tarazi, Executive Director of DSPR Gaza, I sensed that everything is paralyzed in the Gaza Strip. Children are frightened and many are in a state of shock at what is happening. Children are in tears and cannot go to sleep; they feel the insecurity of the situation as they hear the sounds of war and as they see grown-ups at a loss over the destruction of their homes and other tragedies and traumas. Hospitals are overcrowded and their staff overworked. Bombardments and shelling have become background noise that shake the ground under one's home especially during the night. But is it possible to do something at present to respond to immediate needs? Primary health care centers are closed, including those of DSPR Gaza. The closure is due to the danger that looms whenever one ventures out of her/his home. The expectation is that when the war situation is over, there will be mounting pressure to respond to both physical and psychological needs of the traumatized population. Both Constantine and Issa pointed out that a large number of people have no cash to spend on food, hygiene and other essentials. Again once the situation takes some semblance of normalcy, there would be thousands of Palestinians who will seek financial support, will need to rehabilitate and rebuild homes, will have to deal with post traumatic disorders and who will need to be reassured that they are normal people who deserve to be treated like all other normal people elsewhere in our world.

Yes, there is need for intervention. BUT unless intensive work is done to get Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table, not to just discuss another truce but to work out a permanent peaceful solution to the Palestinian – Israeli conflict in its entirety. If this does not happen and if Western governments do not rise up to the challenge of peacemaking, then all the support and aid given to the Palestinian population of Gaza would only be a strip of band aid on an open oozing wound that will not be healed by such aid. So for those willing to help and financially support Gaza and its people as they cope with this war, do please remember that what Gazans and Palestinians need most is PEACE and JUSTICE.