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July 23, 2014

Dear Senator/Representative:

Pope Francis recently spoke about the terrible cycle of violence in the Holy Land. The Pope pleaded with political leaders “not to spare prayer or any effort to end every hostility and seek the desired peace for the good of all.” This Sunday, he reiterated: “May the God of peace arouse in all an authentic desire for dialogue and reconciliation. Violence cannot be overcome with violence.”

Despite this plea, the hostilities between Israel and Hamas have only intensified, bringing death and destruction, especially to the civilian population of Gaza. More than 500 Gazans have died; most of them young children, women and the vulnerable elderly. Israelis should not have to live in fear of Hamas’ indiscriminate rocket attacks on civilian areas. At the same time, Palestinians should not have to live in fear for their lives from air and ground attacks or to suffer the humiliations of the all too long occupation.

This latest bonfire of violence was ignited by the tragic kidnappings and murders of three Israeli youth. In response, it was followed by the arrests of hundreds of Palestinians and the searches of innumerable Palestinian homes in the West Bank. Several Palestinians died during the search. Then there was the consequent kidnapping and murder of a Palestinian youth who was burned alive. These tragic reactions should have reminded us that the status quo is unsustainable. It is a recipe for recurring violence.

Indeed, the Justice and Peace Commission of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries in the Holy Land has declared that all of these killings “are products of the injustice and of the hatred that the occupation fosters in the hearts of those prone to such deeds. These deaths are in no way justifiable and we mourn with those who mourn the waste of these young lives.” The status quo leads to deep desperation in Gaza and the West Bank, and to poverty where there should be economic opportunity. Furthermore, are excessive actions of hostility and indiscriminate punishment not breeding a whole new generation of terrorists?

Catholic Relief Services has had to suspend operations in Gaza due to the violence, but with U.S. support, is prepared to resume humanitarian and development assistance to Gaza’s vulnerable population when a ceasefire is achieved. Such assistance reduces desperation and is good for both Palestinians and Israelis alike.

We urge Congress to support an immediate ceasefire and humanitarian relief for Gaza. In addition, Congress should support the difficult, but essential, work of building a just and lasting peace. Only the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian state in the near term living alongside a recognized and secure Israel will bring the peace for which majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians yearn.

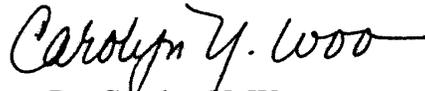
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It is our hope and prayer that one day we might look back and find that this recent cycle of violence was the last—a cycle broken by a just and lasting peace agreement. Together with Pope Francis, let us agree “not to spare prayer or any effort to end every hostility and seek the desired peace for the good of all.” Let our refrain be that of Pope Francis: “Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue.”

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates  
Bishop of Des Moines  
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo  
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