



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

May 15, 2018

Like so many here in our country and around the world, I am appalled and saddened by yesterday's escalation of Israeli military action against protestors in Gaza. Many reports indicate that at least 60 Palestinians, including six children, have died and more than 2,000 have been injured as a result of Israel's disproportionate use of force. Our church will support a planned medical mission from The Lutheran World Federation's Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem to Gaza to assist the wounded.

I join Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar of our partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), who today said:

*We mourn with the families of the dead and dying and pray for the recovery of the injured. We believe that violent actions against the Palestinian civilians will hinder the potential for peace and reconciliation efforts between Israel and Palestine and will only lead to more violence and bloodshed.*

I endorse his call "upon the Israeli government to show restraint and to pursue negotiations with Palestinian leaders rather than choosing violent action against unarmed protestors."

Yesterday's events should also be seen in the context of the opening of the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem. When that decision was announced late last year, I said:

*This unilateral action would not support the cause of peace and a two-state solution but rather would unnecessarily create further tensions and possible violence that would make efforts to bring them back together for talks much more difficult.*

I also support the ELCJHL's long-standing position, affirmed by Bishop Azar today, that "any final status agreement will include Jerusalem as a shared city for Jews, Christians and Muslims with free access to holy sites for all and that it must serve as capital of both Palestine and Israel."

Always, but especially in this time of deep distress, I urge us all to join his call to "continue to pray, advocate and faithfully work towards a peaceful and just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

God's peace,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America