



August 13, 2025
President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President and esteemed leaders of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives,

As presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a denomination of 2.7 million members, I write with profound horror regarding the catastrophe in Gaza and the wider crisis in the Holy Land. I also write to you as a Christian whose messiah preached, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). I urge you to act swiftly and decisively to stop the Israeli government from continuing its war in Gaza. **The lives of 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza depend in part on the decisions you will make in the coming weeks and months.**

The current famine and starvation campaign in Gaza, engineered by the government of Israel, should shock the moral conscience of our nation. The people starving in Gaza are teachers, auto mechanics, doctors, store owners, engineers, farmers, students, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, grandparents and grandchildren. In the 22 months since this devastating conflict began, at least 60,000 people in Gaza have been killed, including 18,500 children. UNICEF now calls Gaza the most dangerous place in the world to be a child and estimates that one child has died there for each hour since the war began. The global community determined decades ago that using starvation as a tool of war is a war crime under the Geneva Convention, per Additional Protocol I, Article 54(1).

The close relationship between the United States government and the government of Israel should be used to end the genocide in Gaza. This includes leveraging the financial, military and diplomatic support provided to Israel by the U.S. government.

For 22 months, the situation in the Holy Land has escalated with no apparent solution. We witnessed the horrific acts committed by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023, against Israeli citizens. The ELCA has been clear in supporting our Jewish-American and Israeli siblings who have suffered because of the Oct. 7 attacks, which directly contravene international law, not to mention human decency and morality. This church has condemned those attacks and prays for all who still suffer, including both the hostages taken by Hamas and those hostages’ families.

This church has also lamented and denounced the subsequent military campaign by the Israeli government in Gaza. Collective punishment and forced displacement of an entire civilian population are also war crimes, as stipulated under the Fourth Geneva Convention, Articles 33 and 49.

The ELCA joins the growing condemnation of the continuing catastrophe of violence, starvation and forced displacement in Gaza, which many international voices are now calling genocide.

During the ELCA Churchwide Assembly last month, members spoke passionately about the situation in Gaza. I was struck by one voting member who, supporting a resolution on this issue, stated, “I acknowledge that the language in [the memorial] is sharp-edged and confrontational. Genocide should be as hard a word to say as it is to hear.” Our church acknowledges that there is nothing easy about determining either the specifics of a mass atrocity event or when such an event legally constitutes genocide. However, evidence provided by credible sources over the course of this year — including the words of our own Christian siblings in the Holy Land and of Israeli human rights organizations and scholars — makes it impossible for us to keep silent in this critical hour.

As of this writing, the Israeli security cabinet, under the leadership of Prime Minister Netanyahu, has approved a plan to take control of Gaza City. This includes expanding military operations in the Gaza Strip and forcibly expelling some 700,000 Palestinians currently surviving in the ruins of the city. It would additionally cut off 300,000 Palestinians in North Gaza from any aid access at all. This would mean putting in harm’s way almost half of Gaza’s population, many of whom are too malnourished, sick, or exhausted to flee the area. Such a forced displacement would undoubtedly lead to the deaths of many Palestinian men, women and children. Among these survivors are 600 of our Christian siblings and the staff at one of the few hospitals still functioning there: the Al-Ahli Hospital, run by the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem.

For the love of God, the sake of our shared humanity and the future of our Palestinian siblings of all faiths, your swift action may be the best and perhaps only way to stop the Israeli government from continuing its war and genocide in Gaza, and to plant seeds of peace and well-being for all in the Holy Land.

Therefore, I urge that you take all necessary steps to:

- 1) Suspend all financial and military assistance from the United States to the Israeli state until it meets two critical conditions: agreeing to a permanent ceasefire and allowing, without restriction or hindrance, humanitarian aid to Gaza through credible, longstanding aid mechanisms such as the United Nations and its affiliated international nongovernmental organizations.
- 2) Initiate an investigation into whether U.S. military aid to Israel has been and is being used in compliance with U.S. and international human rights law.
- 3) Announce publicly that under no circumstances will the U.S. government endorse an Israeli policy that forcibly displaces Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank, including the Israeli government creating conditions on the ground that make Gaza and the West Bank fundamentally uninhabitable for Palestinians to live.
- 4) In line with U.S. allies, recognize Palestine as a sovereign state that can live in peace side by side with Israel, and support Palestine’s full membership in the United Nations.
- 5) Redouble efforts and pressure on the Israeli government to ensure freedom of religion, worship and movement for people of all faiths, be they Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Druze or Baha’i.

Lutherans honor public service and pray for those in authority. We understand and teach that the work of government is an essential way in which Christians love God and serve their neighbor. I pray fervently that you will use the power of your offices — as you did recently, to negotiate a peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia — to ensure a safe future for all our siblings in the Holy Land.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elizabeth A. Eaton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

cc:

The Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House
The Honorable John Thune, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Charles Schumer, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries, House Minority Leader