



Reflections from the Holy Land A Ray of Hope

The recent visit of His Beatitude Cardinal Pizzaballa to Gaza may have taken the world by surprise, but for us working closely with him and knowing how passionate he is about the suffering of our people there, it was certainly overdue. Despite all the risks, the visit was an incredible show of solidarity giving hope to our community. For a few days, he lived the life of our brothers and sisters in Gaza where one has to manage to sleep on the sound of explosions with no electricity and rationed food supplies. What is taken for granted anywhere else in the world has become a luxury in Gaza.



Since the beginning of the war on Gaza, the level of human loss and destruction has been unprecedented in our Holy Land. The statistics issued by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are devastating including 35,500 Palestinians killed and 80,000 injured with 60% in both categories being elderly, women, and children; 1.7 million people (75% of population) who are internally displaced with 60% of residential units damaged as well as 80% of all commercial facilities; 1.1 million people reached catastrophic levels of food insecurity; lack of any electricity, sewage, water or communication networks.

On the health side, most hospitals are out of service with severe shortages of medicines and medical supplies; 800,000 reported cases of acute respiratory infections and 442,000 cases of acute watery diarrhea; and there are 270,000 tons of solid wastewater accumulated on the streets. As for education, 73% of all schools have been destroyed leaving 625,000 school age children without any education or schooling, not to mention that all universities were reduced to rubble. There are currently 17,000 children who are unaccompanied as they were separated from their parents and are most likely orphans. As for humanitarian aid, what is trickling in does not meet a small fraction of the needs and that was complicated further by the closure of the Rafah crossing from Egypt. These pure statistics paint a very bleak picture of the current state of affairs in Gaza, which is only part of the story. The human tragedies we hear about on a daily basis including amputation operations without anesthesia, are simply too much to bear. Humanity is lost in Gaza!



The situation on the West Bank is no less dire with unemployment reaching record levels estimated at 45% without much hope to resume much activity to revive the tourism / pilgrimages industry, nor any breakthrough to the return of the Palestinian workers to jobs in Israel, nor the release of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority to allow it to pay salaries to its civil servants. The economic conditions of most families severely worsened in recent months with any savings put aside for a dark day for most families now depleted with the passage of time. A further complicating factor has been unchallenged settler violence deeming many roads on the West Bank unsafe, let alone the increasing attacks and massive land grabs. Checkpoints have become unbearable as I witnessed firsthand such cruelty a few days ago. After attending a meeting in Ramallah, returning back to Jerusalem which is a 16-kilometer ride took over 4 hours! I can only sympathize with people who need to make such journeys on a daily basis!



As for our work at the LPJ, given the high bar his Beatitude has set for all of us, all departments are working very hard to be of support to our suffering communities whether in Gaza or on the West Bank. In Gaza, the priority continues to be to sustain the livelihood of all refugees under our care at the Holy Family parish complex as well as our sister Orthodox Church and immediate Moslem neighbors. This included adequate supplies of food, water, medicines, personal items, and fuel supplies to roughly 1,000 people on a daily basis. That has been a huge undertaking given the lack of humanitarian deliveries, especially to the north, and the need to buy supplies at black market prices that are 10-20 times their normal pre-war prices. On the West Bank, in addition to continuing pure humanitarian support including food coupons, rental and utilities support, medical support, and tuition support reaching over 12,000 beneficiaries, focus has been on job creation programs including internships, cash for work programs, and income generating projects. To date hundreds of opportunities have been created assisting thousands of individuals. With generous funding by many outstanding donors, we shall continue these programs for the next few months, benefitting many institutions along the way where interns are placed, or projects implemented including elderly homes, schools, orphanages and other service providers.



Once the war is over, the Church has big dreams not only to re-establish its institutions and the services it provided before the war, but potentially to expand such services in other areas where the need is greatest. The recent Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Sovereign Order of Malta aims at the delivery of life-saving food and medical help to the population in Gaza. Other partnerships are being explored to enable the Church not only to restore its previous operations in Gaza, but to also expand such services to help meet the staggering needs and help in rebuilding the community in Gaza. The return of Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, parish priest of Gaza after being stuck out for over seven months will bring in much needed support to the heroic work of the religious already there, but also brings in new energy and enthusiasm for our work there with focus and priority given to restart some educational process to our students after having lost a school year. Our prayers and best wishes go to Fr. Gabriel as well as Fr. Yousef who single-handedly took the brunt of work so far as well as the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Daughters of Charity who have been heroically supporting our brothers and sisters.



A huge thank you to all those who have supported our collective work with your financial support, but more importantly the encouragement, solidarity and above all your prayers. We could not have done it alone and we look forward to continued collaboration. Let us hope that some sanity will return, and this ugly war will come to an end soon so that humanity and dignity are restored to our region and eventually justice and peace prevail!

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Chief Executive Officer
28 May 2024