



Victorian Council of Churches

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A STATEMENT ON ISRAEL and GAZA CONFLICT

by VCC President Rev. Deacon Dr. Joseph Leach, supported by the VCC Standing Committee

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To all people of goodwill.

These last weeks, we have watched the events unfolding in Israel and Gaza with growing dismay and sadness. Any time innocent lives are lost, or the innocent are made to suffer, it is a cause for sadness and grief.

The horror of the brutal terrorist attacks on Israel, where the innocent were abused and murdered, can only be condemned in the strongest possible terms. There is absolutely nothing there to celebrate or support.

The suffering of the civilian population in Gaza which followed, and which is still ongoing, is also a cause for great sorrow. Here too the innocent have been made to suffer. Trapped in an intolerable situation. Thousands have died, even as they took shelter in churches, hospitals, schools and refugee centres. Critical humanitarian supplies have been prevented from reaching people in desperate need.

As Christians, we assert that all governments and organisations, whatever their ideology, faith, or grievance, have a duty to respect the rights and innate dignity of every person, regardless of faith or nationality. This is especially true of the children who have suffered grievously on both sides of this conflict. They have a right to expect care and protection. Instead, they suffer violence.

In the land sacred to the three great Abrahamic religions, the ongoing cycle of violence and revenge must be broken, or the children of today's children will still suffer in the same way. Justice and peace can only come about when those involved look in their enemy's face and see a fellow human, whose dignity is no less than theirs and whose life has the same value as their own.

Here in Australia, we have the good fortune to live in a multicultural democracy where, at least in principle, every person is equal under the law. Here, when we face those of a different ethnicity, faith, or political belief, we see not an enemy but a fellow Australian, someone with whom we must learn to live and work. This is the way that leads to peace, justice, and prosperity. It is a precious gift that needs to be preserved, and we pray that it may be a gift that Australia offers to the world.

As the gathered Christian Churches in Victoria, we pray for all the communities here in Australia who are particularly impacted by the conflict in Israel and Gaza. Together we pray that the God of Abraham, father to Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, will bring peace and justice to the Holy Land. That he will protect the living, heal the wounded, comfort those who mourn, and have mercy on those who have died.

We make this prayer in trust and hope.