



Victorian Council of Churches

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A STATEMENT ON THE CEASEFIRE DEAL BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HAMAS

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. ([VCC statement](#), November 2023)

We welcome the news of a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas after 15 months of war where tens of thousands of people have been killed and many more injured, along with widespread destruction of homes, facilities and infrastructure in Gaza. The trauma of war and loss has been devastating for Israeli and Palestinian people and their diasporas around the world.

The terms of the agreement have taken many months of negotiation. The initial phase will see a halt to the fighting in Gaza for 42 days, and an exchange of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners. There will be an escalation in the humanitarian aid allowed into Gaza, with hundreds of trucks a day providing food, medicine, supplies and fuel to alleviate the chronic humanitarian crisis. Israeli troops will withdraw from populated areas to the edges of Gaza and will allow displaced Palestinians to return to what remains of their homes. Israel will retain control of the territory along Gaza's border with Egypt, including the Rafah Crossing, with Hamas dropping demands that Israel pull out of this area.

The ceasefire deal has the possibility of leading to an end of the 15-month war and a 'sustainable calm'. We long for a permanent ceasefire that will allow unhindered access to humanitarian aid to ensure the well-being of the Palestinian people in Gaza whose lives, livelihoods, hopes and aspirations have been destroyed. We continue to hold hope that lasting peace with justice can prevail in the region.

Let us then remain vigilant in prayer for a permanent ceasefire, and for the ongoing negotiations and political processes involving Israel and Hamas and mediators from the U.S, Egypt and Qatar, as they deal with the pressing questions that need resolution so that all peoples in the region can live in peace, with justice and with dignity.

We are mindful of Victorians impacted directly or indirectly by the ongoing conflict. We recognise the toll it has taken on Jewish and Palestinian communities here in Victoria, and those who have stood in solidarity alongside them. We recognise the significant impact the conflict has had on interfaith relationships. We seek, through prayer and practical action, a restoration of goodwill, mutual understanding and respect, and safety in our communities, and reaffirm our commitment to a robust, resilient and vibrant multicultural and multifaith society where all may live in peace.

Approved by the Victorian Council of Churches Standing Committee, 16th January 2025