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A Clergy Statement on the Violence in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank

We join with so many who are disheartened by the violence in Israel and Gaza in recent days. As easy as it is to focus on the divisions that exist, it is important that we also focus on many Jews and Palestinians who are seeking ways to bridge the gap between each people and that in the days before fighting broke out negotiations were taking place to have an Arab party as part of Israel's government. In a time of violence, the inclination to separate is greater, and for fear and anger to dominate. It is particularly at such a time that we, heirs to a tradition of peace, seek to push back from hate.

As religious leaders, we call on fellow religious authorities – Jewish, Muslim and Christian – to refrain from using words that foster greater enmity or incite more bloodshed and pain. The goal must be the calming of the fever of nationalistic passion and to encourage peace, as well as the rights and dignity of all who live “between the sea and the river” in the land shared by Jews and Palestinians.

Committed to the Zionist goal of Jewish sovereignty, we are unabashed in our love for Israel and belief that the State of Israel is, for all its faults, a nation that seeks to reflect the noblest Jewish values and the goals of its Declaration of Independence that it “foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; ... based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; [and] ... ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex.”

At the same time, we are anguished by the violence we have seen in recent days. With that in mind, we:

1. Condemn Hamas leadership for its unwavering commitment to de-legitimize the state of Israel, its indiscriminate sending of missiles into Israeli civilian areas that is a clear act of war (more than 3200 as of this writing), and its charter which calls for the murder of Jews,
2. Affirm our support for the Israeli government to continue to show restraint in responding to the rocket attacks by seeking every possible means to avoid harm to innocent civilians,
3. Call on all citizens of Israel – Jewish or Palestinian – to refrain from acts of hate based on racial or religious identity, as we applaud the many Israeli Arabs and Jews who have demonstrated together against the internecine violence and for a common future,
4. Disavow any who blame Jews outside of Israel for the actions of the Israeli government as an expression of antisemitism and challenge those in our own community not to cast aspersions against all Palestinians,
5. Remain committed to supporting those organizations that seek to address the inequalities within Israel and undemocratic nature of the ongoing occupation over Palestinians in the “territories” under Israeli control, and

6. Support the United States government in offering a balanced perspective that affirms the legitimacy of Israel to defend itself against aggression, encourages the full integration of Israeli Arabs within Israel and supports efforts that will push Palestinians in Gaza and territories under Israel's control the capacity to develop a peaceful, sovereign state of their own.

We encourage you to be fully informed about what is happening and as *אהבי ישראל ohavei Yisrael* (“lovers of Israel”) to show your support for a Jewish, democratic State, accepting that when we or you critique Israel it is founded in a commitment to ever reach towards its noblest aspirations.

We echo the words of Israeli rabbi Donniel Hartman who teaches that “crisis can be a mirror that shows us how distorted our views have been, that lays bare things we have chosen to ignore. Crisis can evoke humility: ‘He who sees anguish coming upon him will scrutinize his deeds’ (Babylonian Talmud *Berachot* 5a).” In place of blaming others, we hope that this moment will remind us of the unfinished business we all have in fostering the freedom, justice and peace that is our right as Jews and is, we believe, the right of Palestinians, as well.

Thus, we encourage you to become more informed. Read the Israeli press (in English) and don't just get the news from American or international sources:

- [*Ha'aretz*](#)
- [*The Jerusalem Post*](#)
- [*Times of Israel*](#)

From the American Jewish Committee:

- [*What's Actually Happening in Israel and the Gaza Strip*](#)
- [*4 Myths and Facts About the Violence in Jerusalem*](#)
- [*What Hamas is Hiding*](#)

From *T'ruah*: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights

- [*A Very Brief Introduction to the Occupation*](#)
- [*Prayers for the State of Israel*](#)

If you are eager to learn more, we are – as always – available to offer additional perspectives and suggestions for actions you can take to respond. In the coming days we will offer suggestions for actions you can take. In the meantime, we utter the ancient words of the Psalmist:

שְׁאַלוּ שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יִשְׁלֵיוּ אֶהְבֶּיךָ

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; “May those who love you be calm”.


Irwin Zeplovitz
Rabbi


Claire Franco
Cantor


Jade Sank Ross
Rabbi