

5 January 2001

A tragic cycle of violence has once more engulfed the peoples of the Holy Land. As Canadian Christian leaders we mourn the loss of life in this conflict, for all life is a gift from God. Each death, each wounded person, is a grievous testimony to the disorder and sin which are the roots of violence. Far too many have died, far too many have been injured. The gulf between the peoples of Israel and Palestine grows daily wider.

Christian partners in Jerusalem, the Patriarchs and Heads of the thirteen historic churches, issued an Appeal on November 9, 2000, which we quote here:

Today, from the Holy City of Jerusalem, we cry out our desire to see peace with justice, equality and security established soon between Palestinians and Israelis on this Holy Land that was chosen by God to reveal His wisdom to human beings. We appeal to all Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and Protestant churches world-wide, as well as to "friends of peace" in our land, in the region and across the whole world to toil together for the establishment of a comprehensive, just and durable peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

We believe that God desires both Palestinians and Israelis to live in peace, security and economic sufficiency. That is part of the message of the Biblical prophets, part of the fullness of life which Jesus proclaimed, and part of the vision of the historic church of Jerusalem. We believe that the rights which apply to one people must also apply to the other. Both Israelis and Palestinians are entitled to security, and to the right to determine their own future as a people, while respecting the rights of the other.

A just and durable peace between Israelis and Palestinians is only possible if both states are guaranteed a peaceful existence within secure borders.

Palestinians have the right to exist in peace and freedom in an internationally recognized homeland and state. A just and lasting peace demands the speedy implementation of relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, the withdrawal of Israel from settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, and the provision of territorial integrity for a Palestinian state. The support of the international community for the development of the Palestinian state is vital and must include both timely recognition and adequate resources.

Israel must also be assured of its right to exist in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. Israel's legitimacy as a contemporary state, long accepted in international law, must also be affirmed within the movements of the region and throughout the world. Such recognition is vital for the resolution of conflict throughout the region, for the well-being of the Jewish community internationally, and, indeed, for world peace.

The downward spiral of violent protest and violent repression must give way to non-violence and negotiation. This must be accompanied by a shared commitment— shared by all of us— to resisting the promotion of hatred wherever it occurs.

Together with the leaders of the Christian communities worldwide, we call for continued dialogue to ensure that Jerusalem be open and accessible to the people of the three faiths that hold it sacred, and to all residents of the region who see it as the centre of their livelihood and identity.

We commend the Government of Canada for the humanitarian assistance it has provided to the victims of violence. We believe that Canada can play a significant leadership role in the search for peace.

In this Christmas season, we call on Canadian Christians to pray for the peoples of the Holy Land, for all who are victims of violence, and for all who work for peace. Like the church leaders of Jerusalem, we believe that one day justice will prevail and violence will give way to peace and co-existence. We commit ourselves to continue to work together with all who share this hope.

At the birth of Jesus, angels proclaimed "peace on earth." This is our hope and prayer.

Signed by:

- Rev. Dr. Ken BELLOUS, Executive Minister, Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec
- Rev. Glen DAVIS, Moderator, Presbyterian Church in Canada
- Archbishop Hovnan DERDERIAN, Primate of Canada, Canadian diocese of the Holy Apostolic Armenian Orthodox Church
- Commissioner Bill LUTTRELL, Territorial Commander, The Salvation Army, Canada and Bermuda Territory
- Rt. Rev. Dr. Marion A. PARDY, Moderator, United Church of Canada
- Archbishop Michael PEERS, Primate, Anglican Church of Canada
- Bishop Telmor SARTISON, National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
- Rt. Rev. Bishop SERAPHIM, Diocese of Canada, Orthodox Church of America
- Metropolitan Archbishop SOTIRIOS, Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto (Canada)
- Most Rev. Gerald WIESNER, OMI, President, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops