



“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

March 3, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We, as the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), write with utmost urgency after more than 140 days of violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. We urge you to do everything in your power to bring an end to the current suffering and lay the foundation for lasting peace with justice.

As members of the ELCA Conference of Bishops, we are elected to lead one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with nearly 3 million members in more than 8,700 worshiping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. We are compelled to advocate, pray and act by the social teachings of our denomination and by our belief—rooted in Scripture—that all people are made in the image of God.

We mourn the loss of 1,200 precious lives in Israel on Oct. 7 by the actions of Hamas and the trauma for those 250 others who were taken hostage. We mourn the loss of over 30,000 precious lives in Gaza—including tens of thousands of women and children—who have died in Israel’s military action since then and the trauma that ripples outward from this loss. We grieve the deaths of more than 400 Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel since Oct. 7 as the circle of violence expands and makes casualties of yet more civilians.

Too many have suffered. Too many lives have been lost. Strong U.S. leadership is needed to help bring a comprehensive permanent cease-fire, an end to the occupation and lasting peace.

We commend your administration’s stated commitment to ensuring Palestinians in Gaza can remain and that those who have fled should be able to return to their homes once it is safe to do so. We affirm the United States’ opposition to calls by Israeli officials to resettle Gaza. We support your administration’s efforts in working toward an immediate release of hostages held in Gaza in exchange for political prisoners. We call on all parties to abide by the Geneva Conventions and customary international law. We call for the collective punishment imposed on civilians in Gaza to be brought to an immediate end. The United States must do more to help secure the immediate release of all civilians being held hostage and ensure international protection for all civilians.

We welcome the recent order of the International Court of Justice that calls upon Israel “to take all measures within its power” to prevent genocide, in addition to requiring Israel to report the steps it is taking to uphold its obligation to ensure humanitarian aid is reaching the people of Gaza. We call upon your administration to encourage accountability from Israel by taking the appropriate actions to follow through with this order and these responsibilities.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza is worsening. According to the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, more than 24,000 children in Gaza have lost one or both parents. Save the Children reports that 75% of schools, colleges and universities in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged. UNICEF implores the world to respond as 90%

of children under 2 years old in Gaza are subject to “severe food poverty.” We are also concerned that many donor states, including the United States, have suspended funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the primary international organization providing lifesaving aid for millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the region. We call upon your administration to immediately resume funding to UNRWA and encourage other donor states to follow suit. The U.S. government must do more to ensure the immediate and consistent provision of humanitarian assistance.

As leaders in the ELCA, which is committed to peace, we call on your administration and Congress to support the demilitarization of the conflict. In the words of this church’s social teaching: “We denounce beliefs and actions that find ultimate security in weapons and warfare” ([*For Peace in God’s World*](#), p. 5).

The time for a comprehensive cease-fire is now. Israelis and Palestinians must no longer continue to experience these ongoing cycles of war and violence. The United States must help move all parties toward clear commitments to lasting security and peace for both Israelis and Palestinians. This means a homeland for Israelis and a globally recognized State of Israel, including its right to exist. Equally, it means self-determination for the Palestinian people and a state that Palestinians may call home with full diplomatic recognition, in line with decades of U.S. diplomatic policy.

Mr. President, we ask you to support a permanent bilateral cease-fire that will bring a lasting end to the violence. Only then can the root causes of violence and suffering be addressed. We also call upon all parties to work toward a lasting, just peace that protects all human life and ensures the long-term security and sustainability of all those living in the Middle East.

We are also concerned about the consequences that the Gaza conflict has had in the United States, perhaps most vividly in the sharp rise in expressions of anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab, anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim hate. Aware of your efforts to address these trends, we pledge to do all we can to speak out and to work together with your administration and Congress, and with our ecumenical and interreligious partners, to try to prevent all forms of hate that demean the dignity of every person.

Jesus taught: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). Mr. President, child of God and made in God’s image, we are praying with and for you as your siblings in Christ. May God give you everything necessary to meet the needs of this critical moment, particularly peacemaking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yehiel Curry', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

The Rev. Yehiel Curry
Bishop, Metropolitan Chicago Synod
Chair, ELCA Conference of Bishops