News

Women and young girl walk hand in hand through ruins.

Palestinians walk past the ruins of houses in Gaza City March 20, 2024, that were destroyed during Israel's military offensive amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. (OSV News/Dawoud Abu Alkas, Reuters)

Lauretta Brown

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More than 2,500 Catholic bishops, priests, women religious, academics, laypeople and Catholic groups have called for a cease-fire in Gaza in a letter to U.S. President Joe Biden and other world leaders.

"We continue to plead for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza and adherence to international law by all parties," they wrote, citing the calls of Pope Francis and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for a cease-fire in the region as well.

They highlighted statistics that over 34,000 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly civilians, have been killed by Israel's "military assault marked by indiscriminate bombing."

The letter added that "tens of thousands more are severely injured without access to adequate medical care; half of Gazans are facing famine; and most have been displaced from their homes, 70% of which have been destroyed."

By May 8, the number of signatories on the letter, first released May 2, had grown to more than 2,500 from more than 430.

The letter, co-sponsored by the Catholic Advisory Council of Churches for Middle East Peace, Pax Christi USA, Franciscan Action Network and the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, emphasized that "we cannot forget that Christians, most of whom are Palestinian, are an integral part of the Holy Land. Palestinian Christians have long pleaded that Christians around the world listen to their experiences and support their struggle for full equality and rights."

They voiced concern about "the well-being of Muslims, Jews, and others who suffer in Israel-Palestine" and recommited "to opposing antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab discrimination."

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The letter called for "the release of all remaining Israeli hostages held by Hamas, including children and elderly, who were forcibly taken from their homes in southern Israel on October 7, 2023" and mourned "the nearly 1,200 people, mostly civilians, who were killed and the many others who were brutalized and traumatized during Hamas' attack." It also called for "the release of all Palestinian political prisoners held unjustly by Israel."

The letter's writers contended that the U.S. has contributed "to the present violence and to the ongoing systemic injustices in Israel-Palestine" and called on "President Biden, a fellow Catholic, and other U.S. and international leaders, to do everything possible to ensure a permanent end to hostilities, including halting additional shipments of U.S.-funded offensive weapons to Israel, a return of all hostages, and the immediate distribution of robust humanitarian aid to Gaza."

They also stated that "those of us in the United States misperceive the Israel-Palestine situation as a conflict of equally matched sides. In reality, though, there is a great power imbalance, with Israel denying many basic rights to stateless Palestinians and governing much of their lives through military occupation and

illegal settlements (in the West Bank and East Jerusalem), blockade (in Gaza), and other measures of control." They added: "Some of us have had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land and see some of these realities firsthand."

The letter's signatories include Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of San Diego; Archbishop John C. Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico; Brother Lawrence Hayes, provincial minister, Franciscan Friars Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe; Sister Diane Bernier, Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement, minister general; Sister Simone Campbell, a Sister of Social Service, former executive director of Network; Jordan Denari Duffner of Georgetown University on the Catholic Advisory Council, Churches for Middle East Peace; Marie Dennis, senior director, Catholic Nonviolence Initiative of Pax Christi International and past co-president, Pax Christi USA; and a variety of other clergy, women religious, academics and laypeople.