



Being a movement of churches which is based on relational authority as much as that of organizational polity, it is rare for Vineyard Canada to issue statements on behalf of our collective communities.

There are times however, when it becomes necessary to give articulation to a matter where communal discernment concludes that to remain silent not only creates ambiguity, but also implies complicity with something that we deem would be in violation of our sense of conscience, values, and theology.

A Call For An Israel - Hamas Cease Fire In Gaza

The ongoing, bullish aggression of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) has the Gaza Strip and its civilians (including people of multiple ethnicities, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic status) on the cusp of a further wave of atrocities given Israel's proposal to step up its offensive into the city of Rafah. We feel that we must add our voice - not only in the prayer rooms across our nation but also in the public arena - to the clarion call for an immediate and permanent bilateral ceasefire in Gaza.

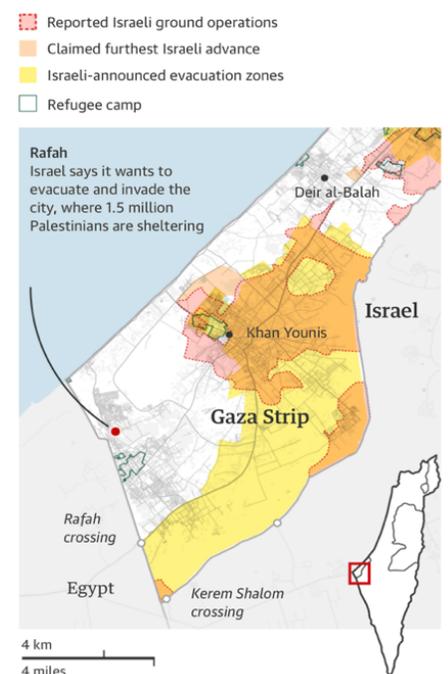
Why Does This Matter?

Amidst the Islamic Resistance Movement's unrelenting call for the destruction of Israel, on October 7, 2023, Hamas militants and other armed groups entered southern Israel from the Gaza Strip, committing atrocities leading to around 1,200 people being killed and approximately 250 hostages taken. Subsequently, Israel launched an unprecedented military offensive along with a "complete siege" of Gaza – cutting off power, food, water, fuel, and vital medical supplies.

This has resulted in a "catastrophic humanitarian situation" as along with the collateral damage of war, very little aid is being allowed into the Strip. The aid that has come in is far below even the minimum requirements for such a catastrophe.

The result is that most Palestinians are now starving – 80% of the hungriest people anywhere in the world now live in Gaza. With a virtually obliterated healthcare system, the risk of death from starvation and disease is projected to be even higher than that resulting from Israel's military operation which already has led to almost 28,000 people in Gaza being killed (including around 12,000 children), with around 7,000 more missing – feared buried under the rubble.

The impact of the impingement of Israeli orders and offensive is that around 1.9 million people - 85% of Gaza's population - have been displaced from their homes and told to evacuate to other areas, often multiple times. Currently, about half of the territory's 2.3 million people are sheltering in the city of Rafah and surrounding areas, situated on Gaza's southern border with Egypt. Rafah's prewar population of several hundred thousand has been massively increased. The resulting growing anxiety and panic in Rafah is beyond suffocating. There is quite literally nowhere left for people to run to in the high-risk environment of the ongoing Israeli offensive.



Further military action in Rafah will only take Israel's offensive to further levels of endless tragedy. There is a plausible risk of genocide against Palestinians. We feel that the evacuation plans and warnings of attack issued by Netanyahu's office fall far short of what is required.

Why Are We Speaking Up Now?

With Hamas continuing to fire rockets into Israel and yet to release 134 hostages who remain in captivity within Gaza, as well as Israel's recent announcement about Rafah, the war and its fallout continues to escalate with no peaceful resolution in sight. While we recognize that the diplomacy and humility required for all embroiled in this conflict to come to the table of reasoning and peace is multi-layered and complex, we feel we must speak up now.

Faced with the reality that most of the Palestinian lives brutally lost have been civilians, we cannot stay in silent complicity with political statements that would describe this horror as simply being "The price of waging war." While recognizing Israel's status as a nation-state and its right to exist, we see its current actions as a heavy overreach. Thus, we believe that an immediate, permanent humanitarian bilateral ceasefire is the only sane and humane way forward.

Blessed are the peacemakers. These are the children of God.

What Do We Do?

We *urge* our Vineyard communities to:

- Pray for peace and an immediate, permanent ceasefire miracle which would include the release of all hostages.

"The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation.

This is the way our Savior God wants us to live."

1 Timothy 2:1-3 MSG.

- Engage in humanitarian and supportive efforts to help alleviate the pain and suffering being experienced in Israel and Gaza today.
- Learn about and become educated about what is taking place in Gaza.
- Reach out to your politicians at civic, provincial, and national levels and lend your voice to ours in a call for an immediate, permanent bi-lateral ceasefire.

A Common Prayer

Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Deliver us from all evil. May forgiveness, justice and mercy roll like a river of healing through the scorched Holy Land. Let Your Kingdom come.

Jesus – Prince of Peace - You are the Only one worthy to open the scrolls of history – past, present and future - and establish righteousness and justice that will last for eternity and bring everlasting shalom. You are the light of the world. You are the hope of the nations. You are the Lamb that was slain. Let Your Kingdom come.

Let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.