

JERUSALEM

## August 15 day of prayer and negotiations for peace in the Middle East

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"In view of the many words of hatred that are all too often spoken, we would like to offer our prayer, which consists of words of reconciliation and peace." "I invite everyone to a moment of intercession for peace to the Blessed Virgin Mary. (...) I hope that the

parishes, the contemplative and apostolic religious communities and even the few pilgrims who are among us, will unite in the common desire for peace that we entrust to the Blessed Virgin." This is the message Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, wrote in a [letter to all the faithful for the feast of the Assumption](#).

**A day of prayer on the feast of 15 August;** on the same day a meeting is scheduled between delegations from the United States, Egypt and Qatar and representatives from Israel. A new diplomatic effort, highly recommended, to find an agreement for a ceasefire and for the release of the Israeli hostages still in the hands of Hamas. Israel confirmed, after a long meeting held in the underground shelters of the Defence Ministry in Tel Aviv, that it will send a delegation. The Israeli government is aware that joining the meeting will push Iran to rethink its retaliation for Haniyeh's murder on its territory, perhaps by making it less virulent. The hypothesis of the agreement is the one presented by US President Joe Biden and approved by the UN Security Council.

**"Many months have now passed since the beginning of this terrible war.** The suffering caused by this conflict and the dismay at what is happening are not only unabated, but seem to be fueled again and again by hatred, resentment and contempt, which only intensify the violence and push away the possibility of finding solution" The Cardinal wrote in the letter in which he invites all the faithful to pray for peace.

**These are difficult days for Israel and Palestine,** but also for the entire Middle East. After ten months of war, the populations are at the end of their tether. A halt to hostilities would probably allow as many hostages as possible who are still alive to return home and give a breath of fresh air to a population wandering from place to place in the Strip in search of shelter.

**Hamas, on the other hand, after an initial assent, announced last night that it would not take part in the meeting,** calling instead for the Biden proposal to be implemented by further negotiations. In any case, Yahya Sinwar, the new political leader of Hamas after the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on 31 July, relaunches his demands and calls for the release of Marwan Barghouti, the former Fatah exponent, in prison since 2002. The request for release had already been made last March, shortly before the Israeli army's attack on Rafah, the Gaza city on the border with Egypt. Barghouti is serving, in Israeli prisons, something like five life sentences, for his leading role in some terrorist attacks during the Second Intifada. He is a Palestinian politician loved by the people and probably the only one who can unite the various souls of the Palestinian people in future elections. Barghouti is also accepted by the inhabitants of Gaza, and this could be a sign that Sinwar is also thinking post-war. The call for

Barghouti's release also seems to be supported by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

**In addition last March, Hamas had also called for the release of Ahmad Saadat,** head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, sentenced to thirty years, for the murder in 2001, of the Israeli Minister of Tourism, Rehevam Zeevi. But not everyone in Israel wants a cease-fire. This is the case of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, of the extreme right, according to whom a ceasefire agreement would be tantamount to a surrender to Hamas, and still according to Smotrich, hostages should not be exchanged for prisoners. The reaction of the Biden Administration was immediate, and through National Security spokesman John Kirby accused the Israeli minister of false claims. "Smotrich should be ashamed of himself for questioning the intentions of the President of the United States, claiming that Biden may support an agreement that puts Israel's security at risk. It is simply wrong, outrageous and absurd'.

**To Smotrich's rescue comes the Minister of National Security,** also of the extreme right, Itamar Ben-Gvir, who in a post on X writes that Israel should permanently occupy Gaza, and that humanitarian aid and fuel supplies should be stopped until all prisoners held by Hamas are released.

**An agreement, like that proposed for 15 August, could partly extinguish the fuse** in northern Israel where Nasrallah (Hezbollah) wants to take revenge for the murder of Shukr, with an attack that would risk plunging Lebanon into a head-on clash with Israel. But the Israeli army, unfortunately, continues in its provocations.

**Tension has risen again due to a new attack by Israel in southern Lebanon,** during which Samer al-Hajj was killed. Al-Hajj was the commander of Hamas military forces in the Palestinian refugee camp of Ein el-Hilweh, near Sidon, and responsible for recruiting and training terrorists to attack the state of Israel.

**But not only Lebanon.** Israeli soldiers have once again attacked Gaza City: according to the Palestinian authorities the victims of the attack are ninety, among them eleven children and six women. The Israeli army claims to have hit the school in Al-Tabeen, in the Al-Sahaba area with four precision bombs and to have killed not civilians, but nineteen Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists, including senior commandos operating inside a control centre, located in the school and in the adjacent mosque. The version of the local authorities linked to the Palestinian movement, who deny the presence of the militiamen, is different. "We confirm that among the people killed in the massacre there was not a single gunman, but only civilians targeted while they were performing the dawn prayer," reads an official note issued by the Hamas spokesman.

**'Once again, the Israeli occupation army has committed a huge massacre** that adds to a series of ongoing crimes in Gaza,' said Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's most influential Shia cleric. And the acting Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Bagheri, in a telephone conversation with the Belgian Foreign Minister, Hadja Lahbib, reported that Iran is determined to make the Israeli regime pay the price for the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

**Egypt and Qatar, too, lashed out at Prime Minister Netanyahu,** who with the attack on the school demonstrates a lack of 'political will to seal peace'. Finally, to be recorded is the return to the streets of the associations of the families of the hostages, according to whom Prime Minister Netanyahu "gambles" with the lives of Israeli prisoners and does so "to guarantee his own survival and that of his government".