

PEACE APPEAL

Israel prepares Lebanon invasion, Patriarch of Jerusalem calls Church to fast and pray

WORLD

30_09_2024

*Nicola
Scopelliti*



359 days have passed since war started between Israel and Hamas bringing death and destruction throughout the Gaza Strip. That tragic 7 October last year has produced deep and unbridgeable lacerations between Palestinians and Israelis, caused 'thousands

of innocent victims, and hatred has also found a place in language and in political and social actions', writes the Patriarch of Jerusalem of the Latins, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, in a message sent to the Christians of the Holy Land ([HERE](#)), almost a year after the terrorist attack by Hamas. 'I therefore invite you to a day of prayer, fasting and penance on 7 October next, a date that has become a symbol of the drama we are experiencing, and which has plunged the Holy Land, and not only it, into a vortex of violence and hatred never seen or experienced before' (read the specially written prayer [HERE](#)).

But 7 October is also the date when the Church celebrates the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary, and the date was not chosen by Pizzaballa at random.

The Patriarch of Jerusalem reiterates his condemnation, manifested several times in these long months, 'of this senseless war and of what has generated it, inviting everyone to stop this drift of violence and to have the courage to find other ways of resolving the current conflict, which take into account the demands of justice, dignity and security for all'. 'We too,' he continues, 'have a duty to commit ourselves to peace, first of all by preserving our hearts from all feelings of hatred, and instead cultivating the desire for good for all. By committing ourselves, each in our own community context and in the ways we can, we should support those in need, help those who are personally committed to alleviating the suffering of those affected by this war, and promote every action of peace, reconciliation and encounter'. Concluding his message, Pizzaballa addresses an invitation to prayer: 'May each one of us, with the rosary or in whatever form he or she deems appropriate, personally, but even better in community, find a moment to pause and pray, and bring to the "merciful Father and God of all consolation", our desire for peace and reconciliation'.

But today, Israelis and Palestinians are two peoples annihilated and devastated by mutual hatred. The latter have before their eyes what is happening in Gaza and the West Bank, and now also in Lebanon; the Israelis think only of the hostages and of returning the inhabitants of northern Galilee back into their homes. Hatred, anti-Semitism, resentment and desire for revenge are spreading far beyond the war zone, and cannot be erased by a simple military victory.

In the meantime, two brigades of reservists have been mobilised and deployed in Northern Israel, ready for ground action that would kick-start the invasion of Lebanon. Strategic plans have been prepared and approved by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his ministers. 'Feel the jets overhead, they serve to prepare the ground for your possible entry. Your boots will enter the villages that Hezbollah has turned into military outposts,' said Herzi Halevi, Chief of Defence Staff. And Netanyahu, through a

statement, clarified: 'We are striking Hezbollah in a way that was never imagined. We are doing it with all force and cunning. I promise you one thing: we will not stop until we achieve our goal'.

Backing up the prime minister and the head of the Armed Forces is Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, an associate of the Chabad Lubavitch movement, and currently head of the Yeshiva Od Yosef Chai in the West Bank. In a letter, made public on Wednesday, he called on the government to occupy Lebanon 'only in this way will it be possible to remove the threat and bring true peace to the entire country. After the conquest and expulsion of the hostile population, a Jewish settlement must be established, thus completing the victory'.

So the situation in the Land of Cedars becomes worse by the hour. Israel has started to raze several villages to the ground with its air force. The victims number almost a thousand, while the wounded number in the thousands. Women and children are forced to relive wartime experiences that one hoped were over. Churches have opened their doors to accommodate the fleeing people. The convents of the Custody of the Holy Land are also involved in welcoming them. 'We opened the doors of the convent to welcome those who fled from the villages in the south. Now we have dozens of families camped out, who have fled without taking anything with them, without even knowing where to go,' said Friar Toufic Bou Mehri, from the Tyre convent.

Hospitals have no more beds and are collapsing. More than 22,000 people have crossed the border between Lebanon and Syria. Many trying to leave those lands, are ready to pay three thousand dollars, in the hope of reaching safer countries.

The last time Israeli soldiers set foot in Lebanon was in 2006, during the Tammuz war, when they encountered many difficulties facing Hezbollah on its territory. The outgoing Lebanese Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, is also in America looking for a way out to stop a new massacre announced in the Cedar Country. But while an agreement for a cessation of the conflict is being sought in New York, the Israeli Air Force has launched an attack on the outskirts of Beirut. The air raid targeted the commander of Hezbollah's drone unit Mohammed Srur, known as Abu Saleh. The operation was approved by Netanyahu while he was flying to New York.

Faced with the war in Lebanon, the Maronite Patriarch, Béchara Boutros Raï, appealed to the UN Security Council to intervene effectively to force the parties involved to 'stop the war and start negotiations'. From Israel, the Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, intervened, threatening to withdraw his party, Otzma Yehudit, from the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, if the latter accepts the proposal

for a ceasefire in Lebanon.