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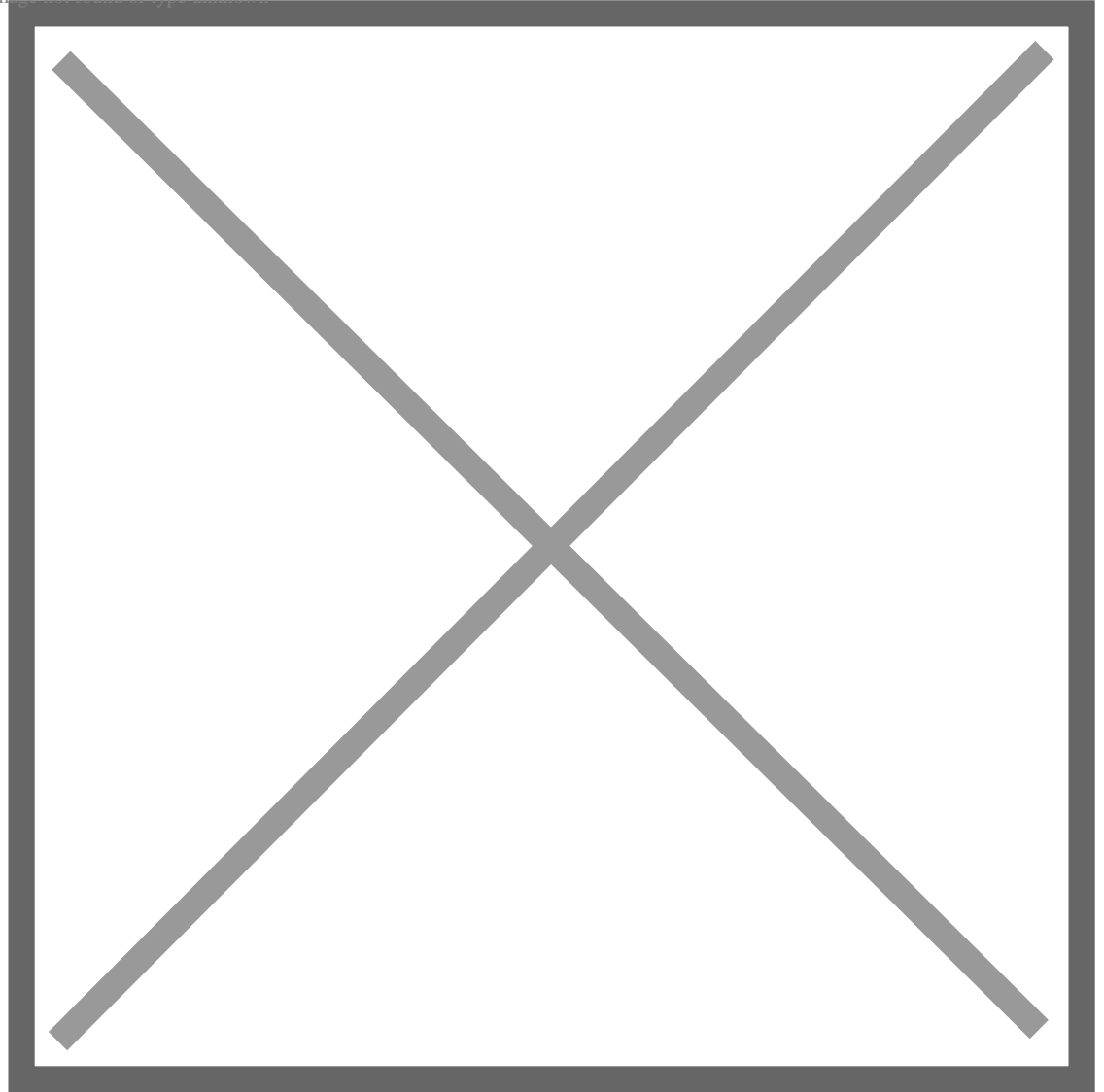
PATRIARCH'S LETTER

Pizzaballa on Israel-Hamas conflict: 'Hatred is overcome by looking to Jesus'

WORLD

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Below, we publish the full letter written by Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa to his diocese, in view of the second anniversary of the war between Israel and Hamas (7 October 2023).

To the diocese of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Dear brothers and sisters,
May the Lord give you peace!

For two years, the war has absorbed most of our attention and energy. By now, everyone is sadly aware of what has happened in Gaza: continued massacres of civilians, starvation, repeated displacement, limited access to hospitals and medical care, lack of hygiene, without forgetting those who are being held against their will.

For the first time, anyway, the news is reporting a possible new positive development: the release of Israeli hostages, of some Palestinian prisoners and the cessation of bombing and military offensives. This is an important and long-awaited first step. Nothing is entirely clear or definite yet; many questions remain unanswered, and much still needs to be defined. We must not delude ourselves, but we are pleased that something new and positive is on the horizon.

We await the moment to rejoice for the families of the hostages, who will finally be able to embrace their loved ones. We hope the same for Palestinian families, who will be able to embrace those returning from prison. We rejoice above all for the end of hostilities, which we hope will not be temporary and will bring relief to the inhabitants of Gaza. We rejoice for all of us, because the possible end of this horrible war, which now seems very close, will finally mark a new beginning for everyone—not only Israelis and Palestinians, but also the whole world. However, we must remain realistic. Much remains to be done to give Gaza a peaceful future. The cessation of hostilities is only the first—necessary and indispensable—step on a treacherous path in a context that remains problematic.

We must not forget, moreover, that the situation continues to deteriorate in the West Bank as well. Our communities now face all kinds of problems daily, especially in small villages, which are increasingly surrounded and suffocated by settler attacks, without sufficient protection from the security authorities.

Many problems remain. The conflict will continue to be an integral part of the personal and communal life of our Church for a long time. In making decisions about our lives, even the most mundane, we must always consider the convoluted and painful dynamics it causes: are the borders open, do we have permits, will the roads be open, will we be safe?

The lack of clarity about future prospects, which are still to be defined, also contributes to the sense of disorientation and increases feelings of distrust. But it is precisely here that, as Church, we are called to speak a word of hope, to have the courage to offer a narrative that opens horizons and builds rather than destroys, both in

the language we use and in the gestures we make.

We are not here to make a political statement or to provide a strategic analysis of events. The world is already full of such words, which rarely change the reality. Instead, we seek a spiritual vision that will help us remain steadfast in the Gospel. This war challenges our consciences and prompts reflection, not only political but also spiritual. The disproportionate violence we have witnessed so far has devastated not only our land but also to the human soul of many, both in the Holy Land and around the world. Anger, resentment, distrust, hatred, and contempt too often dominate our discourse and pollute our hearts. The images are devastating and unsettling, confronting us with what St. Paul called “mystery of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:7), which is beyond human understanding. We risk becoming accustomed to suffering, but it need not be so. Every life lost, every wound inflicted, every hunger endured remains a scandal in God’s eyes.

Power, force, and violence have become the main criteria on which the political, cultural, economic models, and perhaps even religious ones of our time are based. In recent months, we have often heard that force must be used and that only force can impose the right choices. Only by force, it is said, can peace be imposed. Unfortunately, it does not seem that history has taught us much. Indeed, we have seen in the past what violence and force produce. On the other hand, in the Holy Land and around the world, we also have witnessed the outraged reaction of civil society to this arrogant logic of power and force. The images from Gaza have deeply wounded the common consciousness of rights and dignity that lives in our hearts.

This time has also tested our faith. Even for believers, living in faith during difficult times like these is not easy. Sometimes we feel within ourselves a strong sense of distance between the harshness of dramatic events and the life of faith and prayer, as if they were far apart. The use of religion, often manipulated to justify these tragedies, does not help us approach people’s pain and suffering with a reconciled spirit. The deep hatred that invades us, with its consequences of death and pain, poses a significant challenge to those who see in the lives of the world and its people a reflection of God’s presence.

Alone, we will not be able to understand this mystery. By our own strength, we will not be able to stand before the mystery of evil and resist it. That is why I feel an ever more urgent call to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus (cf. Heb. 12:2). Only in this way will we be able to bring order within ourselves and look at the reality with new eyes.

Together with Jesus, as a Christian community, we want to gather the many tears of

these two years: the tears of those who have lost relatives or friends who were killed or kidnapped, those who have lost their homes, jobs, countries, or lives - innocent victims of a conflict whose end is not yet in sight.

The dominant narrative of recent years has been one of clash and reckoning, inevitably leading to the deeply painful reality of polarization. As a Church, reckoning does not belong to us, either as logic or as language. Jesus, our teacher and Lord, made love that becomes gift and forgiveness His life's choice. His wounds are not an incitement to revenge, but a sign of the ability to suffer out of love.

In this dramatic time, our Church is called with renewed energy to witness her faith in the passion and resurrection of Jesus. Our decision to remain, when everything urges us to leave, is not a challenge but an act of love. Our denouncing is not an offense to any party but a call to dare a different path from the reckoning. Our dying took place under the cross, not on a battlefield.

We don't know if this war will truly end, but we do know the conflict will continue because its root causes have yet to be addressed. Even if the war were to end now, all this and more would still constitute a human tragedy that would require significant time and energy to recover from. The end of war does not necessarily mark the beginning of peace, but it is the first essential step toward building it. We have a long road ahead to rebuild trust among ourselves, to make hope tangible, and to free ourselves from the hatred of these years. But we will strive for this, together with the many men and women here who still believe it is possible to imagine a different future.

Christ's empty tomb - at which, more than ever in these past two years, our hearts have paused in anticipation of resurrection - assures us that pain will not last forever, that waiting will not be in vain, and that the tears watering the desert will make the Easter garden bloom.

Like Mary of Magdala at that same tomb, we want to keep searching, even if we are stumbling. We want to insist on seeking paths of justice, truth, reconciliation, and forgiveness; sooner or later, at the end of these paths, we will encounter the peace of the Risen One. And like her, on these paths we want to urge others to run and help us in our search. When everything seems to divide us, we declare our trust in community, dialogue, encounter, and solidarity that matures into charity. We want to continue proclaiming that eternal life is stronger than death with new gestures of openness, trust, and hope. We know that evil and death, though powerful and present in us and around us, cannot eliminate that sense of humanity that survives in every heart. There are many

people in the Holy Land and around the world who are putting themselves forward to keep this desire for goodness alive and are committed to supporting the Church of the Holy Land. We thank them, bringing each of them into our prayers. "Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith" (Heb. 12:1-2).

In this month dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, we pray for this intention: to guard and preserve our hearts and the hearts of those who seek goodness, justice, and truth from all evil. May we have the courage to sow seeds of life despite pain and never give in to the logic of exclusion or rejection of others. Let us pray for our ecclesial communities, that they may remain united and steadfast; for our young people, our families, our priests, religious men and women; and for all who strive to bring refreshment and comfort to those in need. Let us pray for our brothers and sisters in Gaza, who despite the raging war around them, continue to courageously bear witness to the joy of life.

Finally, we join Pope Leo XIV's call for a day of fasting and prayer for peace on Saturday, October 11. I invite all parish and religious communities to autonomously organize moments of prayer for that day, such as the rosary, Eucharistic adoration, liturgies of the Word, and other similar moments of sharing.

We are approaching the feast of the Patroness of our diocese, the Queen of Palestine and of all the Holy Land. In the hope that we may finally gather on that day, we renew our intercessory prayer for peace to our Patroness.

With sincere prayers for all,

Jerusalem, October 5, 2025

†Pierbattista Card. Pizzaballa

Latin Patriarch of