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Geneva, 7 January 2009

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are sending this letter as a word of encouragement to churches in the Middle East and sharing it with member churches around the world.

The international ecumenical family has heard your calls and is listening to your concerns over the crisis surrounding Gaza. It is fitting that, in these very weeks, the [ecumenical prayer cycle](#) invites believers in many lands to pray for the churches of the Middle East and for all the peoples among whom you serve. May the homeland of Jesus find the peace promised in the Christmas message and may God protect you and all your neighbours from the spiral of violence, antagonism and retribution now gripping Gaza and Israel.

We have heard the call for peace in the recent [statement](#) of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem and agree that both parties to the conflict must “return to their senses and refrain from all violent acts, which only bring destruction and tragedy”. We join the churches in Jerusalem in their appeal to the international community finally to “resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a just and comprehensive solution based on international resolutions.”

In company with member churches, other ecumenical agencies and partners in the international community, the World Council of Churches is [calling](#) for an end to hostilities and a new commitment to a negotiated settlement that will assure a just and lasting peace to both Palestinians and Israelis. Such a peace must include respect by all authorities for international law as it applies to human rights, humanitarian aid and protection of civilians in conflict zones. It must reinstate the ceasefire on both sides of the border and speed the lifting of Israel’s blockade on Gaza.

All who receive this letter are invited to pray a prayer for peace from Palestine and Israel (see the end of this letter, or [on-line](#)). Please share it so that our community may pray to God with one voice.

The WCC is also asking churches and ministries to share information about actions they are taking at this time to promote peace with justice.

We will continue to advocate practical action for peace on the part of governments, the Arab League, the European Union and the United Nations. "Raise your voices...speak 'truth to power' and name with courage the injustices we see and experience," the Amman Call challenges us all. "The illegal occupation has stolen two generations of lives...and threatens the next with hopelessness and rage," it continues, reminding at this time that half of Gaza's 1.5 million people are under 18 years of age.

Today's crisis is much deeper than rockets and retaliation. As the [central committee](#) of the World Council of Churches noted early last year:

The humanitarian, human rights and political situation of the people of Gaza has been grave for years and is steadily worsening. The logic of policies imposed upon this tiny strip of territory is being pushed to new extremes. Public order is further threatened by pressures from within. The horizon for those who live in one of the most densely populated places on earth seems to shrink by the day.

Through all the days of 2008, the situation grew worse. Now, we are calling on Christians everywhere to pray for peace and, wherever possible, to inspire and encourage their leaders in the constructive work that leads beyond enmity to reconciliation. As a new year dawns, we pray for you with a prayer from Palestine and Israel.

God of mercy and compassion,
Of grace and reconciliation,
Pour your power upon all your children in the Middle East.
Let hatred be turned into love, fear to trust,
Despair to hope, oppression to freedom,
Occupation to liberation,
That violent encounters may be replaced by loving embraces,
And peace and justice could be experienced by all. Amen.

*From 'Imagine Peace', a devotional resource from the WCC
Decade to Overcome Violence, 2008.*

Yours in Christian love and service,



The Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

cc: WCC Member Churches outside the Middle East