



Reflections from the Holy Land As we approach the one-year mark!

As we approach the one-year mark of 7 October 2023, it is hard to believe that not only the war in Gaza is still ongoing, but that a new front in Lebanon is quickly advancing to an all-out war promising that an already bleeding region is destined to a regional war with more destruction and loss of innocent human life. If all the money being spend on weapons was directed to building and development, our region would be in a much better place. The people on the ground are ready for peace, but unfortunately failed leadership on all sides will not allow, at least for now, the wish of the masses for a life characterized by justice, equality, respect, coexistence and freedom for all who call our region home.

As we approach the one-year mark, and as we look at statistics out of Gaza the world has forgotten that there is a life behind every number. These statistics include over 41,000 killed including 60% women and children; close to 100,000 injured; a destroyed health and educational systems; over 60% of dwellings and 68% of road networks destroyed; with no infrastructure including electricity, water, sewage, communications; and very limited humanitarian aid trickling in; not to mention the miserable living conditions with 1.9 out of the 2.3 million people displaced and living on the streets and having to be forced to relocate from one “so called humanitarian zone” to another with zero consideration to what that means. Additionally, with the Lebanon front escalating, who is thinking about Gaza anymore as this war has been normalized in the eyes of many around the world and simply forgotten. Also, as the attention was on Gaza for most of the past year, what about the suffering and injustice that is taking place day in and day out on the West Bank. Land grabs and settlement expansion and settler violence continues, and the annexation of the West Bank is continuing at full speed, with the only thing missing is to give it the official name.

As we approach the one -year mark, it has become clear that the Church always rises during conflicts and wars and ends up being at the forefront of being among and with the people sharing their suffering and comforting them not only spiritually, but with material support. Since the beginning of the war, there has not been a stone not turned to provide all means of survival for our brothers and sisters in Gaza including shelter, food, water, medicine, and personal needs, let alone a modest remedial education, all done under fire and immediate risk to our heroes in Gaza who put their lives in immediate danger to be of help. On the West Bank, again every effort was made to initially at the beginning of the war to provide food coupons, cash assistance, tuition support, rental support, utility bills support, and medical support.





As the war continued, and the loss of jobs became extended, major job creation, empowerment and capacity building and income generation programs were launched to give people hope and allow them to make an income in a dignified way. In total, close to 13,000 people have benefited from the various schemes, and every effort will be made to continue these schemes as long as needed.

As we approach the one-year mark, we are very proud that apart from our humanitarian assistance, we did not lose sight of our responsibilities for the educational activities. A few weeks ago, close to 19,500 students in 44 LPJ schools, served by over 1,700 teachers returned to classrooms to receive a good academic quality education where the Christian value set is practiced and not only taught. Where else is the language of peace, justice, coexistence, love, respect, tolerance and forgiveness being promoted when the key words on the streets are hate, revenge, and killing! This message cannot be overemphasized as it is the only way forward to enable our societies to emerge from the deep hole, they find themselves in.



As we approach the one-year mark, we also did not lose sight of our pastoral dimension and the critical need to strengthen the faith as a means not to lose hope. Several initiatives came to life including the stunning success of the spiritual formation center established at the Seminary in Beit Jala to offer courses to the laity. All courses offered since the beginning of the war were oversubscribed with courses now being expanded to Jerusalem and Ramallah. The Family center in Beit Jala with a satellite center in Ramallah were launched, to join the well-established Amman center with the launching of the family center in Haifa being just around the corner. In addition, the Bailasan Counselling Center was inaugurated in Bethlehem last June with individual and group counselling surpassing all expectation during its first weeks of operation. This is in addition to all the normal pastoral activities of summer camps, youth chaplaincy, Sunday schools, and the important work of the catechetical and liturgical offices to name a few. We cannot be prouder to be with and among the people serving their daily spiritual needs.



As we approach the one-year mark, we cannot be more thankful to our thousands of donors from all corners of the world who put their trust in the LPJ to be of maximum support not only to our Christian communities, but to all through our various humanitarian and educational activities. The church has always survived wars and crises and has always emerged stronger. This war will be no exception!

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