



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

War destroys not only with weapons



The situation in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel continues to be extremely tragic. Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Governor General, Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, also spoke about this with Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, during the audience granted to them on Saturday, 20 January.

Having recently returned from their pilgrimage for peace in the Holy Land (28 December 2023 - 3 January 2024) during which they presented to the Patriarch of Jerusalem and Grand Prior of the Order, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, a donation of approximately US\$1 million (collected through voluntary donations from the Knights and Dames of the Order around the world who wished to be close to and support the enormous humanitarian needs of the population affected by the conflict as much as possible), they were able to share their impressions and recount their experience.

At the present time and for more than 100 days, there are 600 people who have found shelter in the Holy Family Catholic Church compound in Gaza and are in need of food, water, medicine, and clothing, and another 200 Christians in the Greek Orthodox Church compound. Every possible effort has been made by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem to provide for their needs. However, it is not possible at this stage of the conflict to gain access to or offer more support inside Gaza.

Instead it is possible to provide aid in the rest of the Palestinian territories where the situation, although not as tragic as in Gaza, is still extremely complex, even if the press speaks less about it. Recent UN figures speak of more than 300 Palestinians killed, more than 4000 injured and 1200 people who have had to leave their homes. But, in addition to this, the total collapse of the tourism sector (think mainly of the Christian families employed in this sector in Bethlehem) as well as the revocation of permits for many Palestinians to work in Israel and the interruption of the transfer of taxes from Israel to the Palestinian Authority is bringing the local economy to its knees, causing a dangerous rise in the unemployment rate and great economic difficulties for families.

Through the work of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Order is helping the survival of refugees in the parish of Gaza and to numerous humanitarian situations in the West Bank. The humanitarian aid, according to different needs, consists of food vouchers, financial contributions for utilities or school fees, the purchase of medicines and the coverage of medical expenses. With many people losing their jobs, the goal in the West Bank is to work towards more sustainable solutions by supporting the development of small businesses or initiatives and, in general, to help the local population find ways to generate income.

War is tragic where there is conflict, lives are in danger and people die. Then there are the places that suffer the collateral effects, where the bombs do not fall but where destruction nevertheless takes place: the consequences of this conflict are having a profound impact in Palestine and Israel, and right now what is possible and necessary is to ensure the economic and psychological support of so many who are in need and can no longer provide for themselves and their families. More concrete plans for Gaza will have to wait until the end of the war, but there is so much to be done already in the West Bank, Palestine and Israel, and through the contributions sent by the Lieutenancies of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, the fruit of the individual and spontaneous generosity of so many of our Knights and Dames, it is possible to continue to support the Latin Patriarchate in its humanitarian action.

(January 2024)