

# Jerusalem church leaders seek halt to Gaza violence: "Deep concern, regret and shock"

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The heads of Christian churches in Jerusalem have denounced the devastating hostilities in the Gaza Strip as well as "all forms of violence and killings from all parties"—an appeal in the closing days of 2008 heard from government officials and religious leaders alike.

The ever-elusive goal of peace in the Holy Land was shattered by days of Israeli air strikes described as retaliation for continuing rocket attacks by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad from Gaza into Israel.

In a joint statement made available December 30, the church leaders in Jerusalem noted that "this bloodshed and violence will not lead to peace and justice but breed more hatred and hostility." They urged Christians to observe a worldwide day of prayer on January 4.

This came after five days of violence had left more than 360 people dead. According to the UN Relief and Works Agency, at least 62 of those killed in the first five days were civilians.

"We, the Patriarchs, Bishops and the Heads of Christian churches in Jerusalem, follow with deep concern, regret and shock the war currently raging in the Gaza Strip and the subsequent destruction, murder and bloodshed, especially at a time when we celebrate Christmas, the birth of the King of love and peace."

The Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran church leaders called on Israelis and Palestinians to resolve their differences through peaceful and nonviolent means and for the international community to meet its responsibilities to intervene. To the various Palestinian factions, they added: "It is time to end your division and settle your differences. We call on all factions at this particular time to put the interests of the Palestinian people above personal and factional interests." *-Ecumenical News*

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