



Joint Ecumenical Statement on the Widening Conflict in the Middle East

The World Council of Churches, Middle East Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Communion of Reformed Churches, World Methodist Council, Mennonite World Conference, Christian Conference of Asia, and ACT Alliance join in expressing their deep concern regarding the humanitarian and social impacts of the widening conflict in the Middle East, and the threat it poses to the peace and security of the region and the world.

Having endured many years of complex political, economic and social challenges, the people of Iran—numbering more than 92 million—now face the immediate threats of the current conflict, and a very uncertain future.

The use of force by the United States and Israel against Iran, the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on 28 February, and Iran's subsequent retaliation, have resulted in a war that threatens peace across the region and beyond. It also raises serious concerns regarding the safety and well-being of civilians, a tragic example of which is the reported deaths of as many as 175 schoolgirls and staff in a missile strike on a girls' school in the southern Iranian city of Minab.

The humanitarian risks and suffering will inevitably escalate the longer this conflict continues. Moreover, we are gravely concerned by the increasing reports indicating serious violations of international humanitarian law during the ongoing military operations. We insist that as a matter of moral and legal obligation all conflict participants must protect civilians from harm, and refrain from targeting civilian areas and infrastructure.

Moreover, we fear that the conflict may result in a new period of prolonged violence and instability in the wider region. It is already engulfing many countries in the region and beyond. In Lebanon, the situation has escalated into a full-scale Israeli attack affecting multiple regions of the country, including the capital, Beirut. Extensive destruction has been inflicted on residential neighbourhoods in Lebanon, especially in the southern suburbs of Beirut and large areas of southern Lebanon. The intensification of hostilities has resulted in widespread civilian suffering and has forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes in search of safety. Iraq too has been affected by the regional escalation, with growing tensions and security concerns adding further strain to an already fragile context. Iranian retaliatory strikes have also impacted several Gulf countries, as well as Cyprus and Azerbaijan.

Further, we are deeply concerned that these attacks and their consequences will likely cause even larger population displacements in a region with an already very high number

of displaced people, and with woefully inadequate provision or planning to ensure the welfare of IDPs within Iran or refugees in neighbouring countries.

In addition to the immediate consequences of death, destruction and displacement in Iran and the most affected countries, this conflict is already now impacting the lives and livelihoods of people, communities and societies in the whole region. Along with the rest of society in Iran and the wider region, churches and Christian communities face the dangers this war poses for their future.

It must be emphasized that the joint Israeli and US attacks are clearly illegal under international law. They are conducted without any credible substantiation of the alleged imminent threat from Iran, and are in flagrant violation of the UN Charter which was created precisely to save the world's people from the scourge of war. The abandonment of diplomacy in favour of armed attack is reckless and irresponsible.

Having taken this path, Israel and the United States of America must not be permitted to once again create a desolation and call it peace. They must take responsibility for the consequences of their actions, including the consequences for the future of the people of Iran whose freedom they claim to promote.

We appeal for an immediate ceasefire, for the urgent resumption of diplomatic engagement and political dialogue through established international and regional mechanisms, and for full compliance by all States with their obligations under international law, including the UN Charter.

Our appeal is grounded in our faith and our Christian ethical values, as well as in law and policy. We affirm that war is incompatible with God's very nature and will for humanity, and against our fundamental Christian principles. Peace is a moral and spiritual imperative rooted in our faith in a God of justice and compassion, and a gift not achieved through force or strength of arms. Human dignity is sacred, reflecting the image of God. Any assault on civilian life or systematic violation of human rights, whether through external attack or internal oppression, is a direct affront to God-given human dignity and the sanctity of life.

In this conflict and in our wider global context, we lament the absence of morality and legality, the prevailing arrogance and ideologies of power, and the replacement of conscience with political utility. As Christians, we do not recognize any divine licence to kill, destroy, displace or occupy. We proclaim the God-given human dignity and rights of all people, equally and without discrimination. We reject the brutal logic of war and domination. We seek the gift of peace.

We pray for the people of the Middle East who have suffered too much violence for too long, and too often as the result of interventions by external actors. We invite all churches

and Christians of the world, and all people of faith and good will, to join in praying for peace in the Middle East, and everywhere in our world where there is conflict and strife.

God, bring an end to violence and injustice.

Inspire leaders to work towards the well-being of all people.

May your love and compassion prevail, uniting nations in a common pursuit of peace.

Let your kingdom of peace reign on Earth as in heaven.