UNARMED CIVILIAN PROTECTION IN PALESTINE (UCPiP)

A Personal Appeal from Palestine

11 September 2026

His Holiness Pope Leo XIV
Apostolic Palace
Vatican City

Re: An urgent appeal for the protection of the Palestinian people and for unarmed civilian protection

Most Holy Father,

I am writing to you as a Palestinian Catholic, a mother, and someone who has spent the past years working alongside Palestinian communities to protect people without using violence.

I was deeply inspired by your call for an "unarmed and disarming peace." Those words stayed with me because they describe what we are trying to do every day in Palestine through Unarmed Civilian Protection: standing beside people who are threatened, accompanying families and communities, de-escalating violence where we can, and refusing to leave people alone when they are afraid.

Sometimes all we have is our presence and our bodies. We carry no weapons. We believe that protecting human life should not require taking another human life. We believe with you that unarmed defense has the power to disarm. Cardinal Bo, from Myanmar, recently declared that "legitimate defense is operationalized through nonviolent strategies such as unarmed civilian protection."[1]

His Holiness, we know that you are well aware of the genocide and humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and the escalating ethnic cleansing, forced displacement, settler terrorism, military violence and dispossession across the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We deeply appreciate your efforts to bring this suffering to an end.

But from what we are witnessing and living on the ground, we are running out of time.

OUR APPEAL

This is an appeal for the protection, dignity and future of all Palestinians—Christians and Muslims alike.

COME — Come to Palestine. Spend time in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, not only in the holy places, but among the people and communities facing killing, displacement and dispossession. Your physical presence would tell Palestinians that they have not been abandoned.

SPEAK — Use the full moral and diplomatic weight of the Holy See to call unequivocally for an end to the killing, forced displacement, destruction and dispossession of Palestinians—and call upon governments to move beyond statements and take concrete action.

MOBILIZE — Call upon the global Catholic Church to fund, recruit and send trained unarmed civilian protectors to Palestine. Around twenty small groups are already carrying out this work, but together we can field only around one hundred people on any given day. We need hundreds, and ultimately at least one thousand. Experienced practitioners on the ground are ready to train and support them.

[1] https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2026-09/cardinal-bo-nonviolence-catholic-institute-pax-christi-rome-even.html

UCP in Palestine
civilians protecting civilians

PROTECT — Help Palestinians remain on their land and, within this broader struggle for the survival and dignity of the Palestinian people, give urgent attention to the rapidly diminishing indigenous Palestinian Christian presence in the land where Christianity was born.

Come. Speak. Mobilize. Protect.

COME AND STAND WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

We know how extraordinary it is to ask the Pope to enter a place experiencing war, occupation and enormous suffering. But we are asking anyway.

Please come to Palestine.

Come spend at least three days with the people of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Not only in our churches and holy places. Come to the communities.

Meet families who have lost loved ones. Meet people who have been displaced from their homes. Meet shepherds and farmers struggling to remain on their land. Meet mothers frightened for their children. Meet Palestinian Christians and their Muslim neighbors who have lived together on this land for generations.

Through our work, we have learned something very simple: Presence can protect.

When the world is watching, people behave differently. When someone stands beside a vulnerable family, that family knows it has not been completely abandoned.

Imagine what the physical presence of the Pope could mean. It would tell Palestinians: You have not been forgotten. You are not suffering alone.

SPEAK — AND ASK THE WORLD TO ACT

We are grateful every time His Holiness speaks about Palestine. But today, we are asking you to go further.

Please use the moral authority of your office and the diplomatic influence of the Holy See to tell governments that expressions of concern are no longer enough.

Ask them to act.

Demand an end to the killing of civilians, forced displacement, collective punishment and dispossession.

Demand protection for Palestinian civilians and unhindered humanitarian assistance.

Speak for Palestinians who are imprisoned and detained, including those held without charge or trial.

Demand respect for international law and accountability for its violations.

Every day that passes means more lives lost, more homes destroyed, more families displaced and more communities erased.

There are moments in history when statements are not enough. We believe we are living through one of those moments.

MOBILIZE THE CHURCH FOR UNARMED CIVILIAN PROTECTION

This is where we believe the Church can do something extraordinary—and practical.

Across Palestine today, around twenty small groups carry out different forms of protective presence and accompaniment. We are Palestinians, Israelis and internationals.



We accompany shepherds. We stay in threatened communities. We walk alongside families. We respond when communities call us. We document attacks. We try to de-escalate dangerous situations. Sometimes we simply sleep in a community because families are afraid of what might happen during the night.

But together, we can field only around one hundred people on any given day. It is nowhere near enough.

We need hundreds. We need at least one thousand trained unarmed civilian protectors, and potentially many more.

His Holiness, call upon Catholics around the world to come.

Call upon dioceses, religious orders, Catholic universities, peace organizations and lay communities to recruit people willing to spend time in Palestine as trained unarmed civilian protectors.

Ask the Church to help fund them, prepare them and send them.

Not as soldiers. Not carrying weapons. But as human beings willing to stand beside other human beings.

We are not asking the Church to create this work from nothing. We are already doing it.

We are experienced practitioners. We have training, field experience, safety procedures and deep relationships with Palestinian communities. We are ready to train and support those whom the Church mobilizes.

His Holiness's vision of an "unarmed and disarming peace" can become something tangible in Palestine. It can become people protecting people.

HELP PALESTINIANS REMAIN — AND DO NOT LET PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANITY DISAPPEAR

Our appeal is for all Palestinians.

Every Palestinian—Christian or Muslim—has the same right to life, dignity, freedom, protection and the ability to remain on their land.

But as a Palestinian Christian, I also carry a particular fear that I want to bring directly to His Holiness.

The indigenous Christian presence in Palestine is becoming smaller and increasingly fragile.

We come from the land where Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again. Christianity was born in this land. Yet Palestinian Christian families continue to leave because life has become increasingly difficult and because parents no longer know what future they can promise their children.

Every family that leaves makes this ancient community smaller.

I am afraid of a future in which Christians from around the world continue to travel to Bethlehem and Jerusalem. They will visit the Church of the Nativity. They will visit the Holy Sepulchre. They will walk through the places where Jesus lived.

The churches may still be there. The stones may still be there. But the people may be gone.

Please help prevent that future.

Help Palestinian Christians remain through protection, housing, employment, education, economic support, advocacy and international accompaniment.

Protect the holy places, certainly. But please also protect the living stones.

And in doing so, stand for the right of all Palestinians—Christian and Muslim—to live safely, freely and with dignity in their homeland.

A PERSONAL REQUEST



Finally, I have one personal request.

I am currently in Rome where I participated in The Catholic Institute for Nonviolence and Pax Christi 2026 Conference and will return to Palestine on Sunday at noon.

I tried to meet you today and I would remain available to meet with you anytime before I leave Rome on Sunday.

I do not need a long meeting.

I simply want the opportunity to speak directly, as a Palestinian coming from the ground, about what our communities are experiencing and about what we believe the Church can concretely do.

I want to bring His Holiness not only our suffering, but also a possible path of action.

We are not asking the Church to take up arms. We are asking the Church to stand with us.

Come. Speak. Mobilize. Protect.

Help us demonstrate that an “unarmed and disarming peace” can be more than words. Help us put it into practice in the land where Jesus taught us: “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

And please stand with the Palestinian people while we are still there.

With hope and profound respect,

Amira Musallam

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UCP in
Palestine
civilians protecting civilians

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PAX CHRISTI INTERNATIONAL

Harvesting the Rich Experience of Active Nonviolence to Guide the Church and the World



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