

Hamas and Israel: the peace diplomacy of the children of Jerusalem and Bethlehem

“Victims of a war they do not want and of which they are not the cause, the children of the Holy Land demand peace”, Fr. Ibrahim Faltas, Vicar of the Custody of the Holy Land, told SIR after children from Holy Land schools in Jerusalem and Bethlehem gathered in a demonstration for peace on three separate occasions last week.



[The first initiative took place on 4 November in the courtyard of the Terra Sancta school in Jerusalem, where 400 children gathered around a painting depicting Jesus' invitation “Let the little children come to me”; the second was on 9 November, just before sunset, also in Jerusalem, called by the Arab Catholic Scout Associations; and the third in Bethlehem on 11 November, this time in the Manger Square, in front of the Nativity scene. The three events were linked by a painting that Father Faltas himself commissioned from a Palestinian artist, depicting “a sad child: I am deeply aware of the suffering of the children of the Holy Land, which I believe is the suffering of all children involved in wars throughout the world.”](#)



[The children of Jerusalem expressed their feelings in a touching presentation of “fear and hope.” “They put into writing their thoughts which should prompt reflection among adults, especially among those who could put an end to the atrocities of the ongoing war”, Father Faltas told SIR. “The Custos, Father Francesco Patton, who attended the meeting, was touched and moved by the children's words and stressed the educational value of our schools and the need for continuous formation in the culture of peace. The children and young students asked for the gift of peace from God, but also from their respective leaders. Peace for their country, for their peers under the bombs, and for all those who have the right to hope for the future.” “One day - said the Custos of the Holy Land - in a complicated society like those in the Middle East, they will become people who choose peace as part of their life.” “**We are not alone.**” On Thursday 9 November, once again in the Holy City, a prayer vigil for peace was held in the courtyard of the Terra Sancta school just before sunset, on the initiative of the Arab Catholic Scouts and the associations "Sabeel" and "Serviens in spe". Father Faltas welcomed the many students and children gathered with a reflection centred on ‘daring to ask for the precious gift of peace’. The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal **Pierbattista Pizzaballa**, presided over the prayer. He urged the children in particular not to give up hope for peace: “The fact that we are here is a sign that we have a clear orientation for this time, and that is to live it as a community, as one. There is no room now for our little misunderstandings. As Christians, but especially as believers,” said the Patriarch, “we know](#)

that God has something to say in our lives. And our God has the face of Jesus: we have to start with Him. There are many questions we cannot answer, but believing in His presence is a consolation for us: perhaps it is not the consolation we seek, but we are not alone.” The Cardinal went on to pray: “We say: yes, Jesus. Our hearts are heavy. We do not understand. We have expectations, but we entrust ourselves to you: please help us to entrust everything to you.” Closing the Vigil, the Patriarch recalled the small Christian community living in Gaza, which, he said, “is going through a terrible situation. We heard that many of them have lost everything, that every day is a day of suffering. Every day they have to decide whether to leave, but they say: 'No, we will stay because we believe in God'. Everything ends with "Jesus will help us. Jesus will not abandon us". The vigil was concluded by the children's choir and the blessing of the Patriarch, while everyone lit a candle in memory of the many victims of the ongoing war.



On Saturday 11

November, at the initiative of the Palestinian Ministry of Education and in the presence of the Mayor and the Governor of Bethlehem, children from the city's schools gathered in front of the Basilica of the Nativity in Manger Square to commemorate the 19th anniversary of the death of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and to pray together for peace. The boys and girls of the Terra Sancta school were present. Also in Bethlehem, Father Faltas added, “the children expressed through songs, messages and drawings their desire to live in their own land, in peace and security. They released colourful balloons into the sky symbolizing their hope that their voice will be heard. “ “I send out my appeal and I pray with them,” concluded the vicar of the Custody of the Holy Land. “They are the first victims of this horror: even those who are not physically affected will carry an indelible trauma in their eyes, hearts and souls. God will hear their cries and their prayers.”

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