
Israel and Hamas: the first group of children from Gaza in Italy for medical treatment. Father Faltas (Custody): “This is the right path to peace”

The first group of 11 Palestinian children and their families landed last night at Ciampino military airport on a special Air Force flight. They will receive specialised medical treatment in paediatric hospitals in Italy. The children arrived in Egypt through the Rafah border crossing just four days ago. They were treated and stabilised by Egyptian medical staff in local hospitals before being flown to Italy. Other children and accompanying family members will arrive on a later flight and via the Italian naval vessel Vulcano, which is due to set sail on Wednesday 31 January. Defence Minister **Guido Crosetto** expressed his satisfaction with this humanitarian operation. “Only with international cooperation can we face such great challenges and guarantee the safety of the most vulnerable persons”, stressed the Minister, who added: “Our country will continue to help the Palestinian civilian population who are the innocent victims of Hamas terrorists. We are ready to welcome these Palestinian children and their families.” **The right path.** “This is the right direction”, Father Ibrahim Faltas, vicar of the Custody of the Holy Land, among those who inspired the humanitarian mission, told SIR. The friar was in Italy last week to meet with the directors of two children's hospitals, the Bambino Gesù in Rome and the Meyer Hospital in Florence, which along with other major children's hospitals such as the Gaslini Hospital in Genoa, offered medical assistance with the collaboration of the Puglia and Emilia Romagna regions, the University of Perugia and the Republic of San Marino. “The road to peace is beginning to take concrete shape,” said Father Ibrahim, who was in Ciampino last night to welcome the young children from Gaza, together with Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, General Francesco Paolo Figliuolo, the Palestinian Ambassador to Italy, Abeer Odeh, and many others. Father Faltas collected accounts of the suffering endured by these children's families: “A mother with two wounded children lost her husband and a daughter in the same bombardment, other children are sick and orphaned, families divided to ensure treatment, families with no known survivors: they all carry wounds in body and spirit.” The friar was the interpreter of these families' stories to Minister Tajani. “While they shared their pain with us, they also brought us smiles of gratitude for Italy's generous welcome”. “When you look at their innocent eyes,” Father Ibrahim continued, “you can see all their sadness, a humanity devastated by the horrors of war.” Now only “the hope of a ceasefire can bring them relief. We remain hopeful. In a few days, the ship Vulcano will arrive in Italy with more children in need of medical care. The ship Vulcano has already treated many wounded and sick people in Egypt and helped mothers give birth to children, 'new lives that give new hope.”



[. Memories of the meeting with Pope Francis on 22 November last year accompanied last night's meeting at Ciampino. “It was a private audience - said Father Faltas \(who, among other things, delivered a letter from Palestinian President Abu Mazen to the Pope, Ed.'s note\) - during which the Pope expressed his deep sorrow for wars and for the children who suffer as a result. I left that meeting encouraged by the Pope, so I asked my physician friends at Bambino Gesù for permission to visit the young patients there. I needed to meet them to understand how I could help the sick and wounded children of the Holy Land. I had with me some Christmas items made in Bethlehem, and when I gave them to the young patients and their mothers, I saw the same eyes as those of the children and mothers of the Holy Land.” The solidarity](#)

and collaboration of the Bambino Gesù Hospital in Rome then took concrete form, thanks to its President, Tiziano Onesti, and his staff.

"Once again, Italy responded to this call."

Italians don't just offer words, they also act. They are people with a good heart, whose actions are carried out with competence and care." **The desire for peace.** The Vicar of the Custody of the Holy Land addressed a final thought to the three young Israeli women, aged 19, who are being held hostage in the Gaza Strip and who appear in a video released by Hamas: "The video is powerful in the manner in which they ask the Israeli government to stop the war because they want to live, because they have the right to live and they do not want to lose their lives. This is the same desire, the same need as the children and young people in Gaza. Those are the feelings of Israeli and Palestinian children in this part of the world. On the many occasions when they meet for 'Peace Education' projects, all the children say that "living in peace is achievable." "To live in peace: this is what all children in the Holy Land want. Father Ibrahim concluded: "We see the suffering of this wounded humanity, pain has no colour, no identity card." "Yesterday, an important journey of peace began. It is the only way forward: to begin by helping the wounded children, we have set out on the right path."

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