

## Israel and Hamas. Sister Saleh (from the parish): "Gaza, our home, our church, our cemetery"

"I carry daily in my heart, with sorrow, the suffering of the populations in Palestine and in Israel, due to the ongoing hostilities. The thousands of dead, wounded, displaced, and the immense destruction cause suffering, and this has tremendous consequences on the small and the defenceless, who see their future compromised. I ask myself: do we really think we can build a better world in this way? Do we really think we can achieve peace? Enough, please! Let us all say it: enough, please! Stop!" **Pope Francis'** heartfelt appeal during the Angelus prayer on Sunday, brought immediate consolation to the people of Gaza, especially to about 600 displaced people sheltering in the facilities of the Catholic Parish Church of the Holy Family and the Orthodox Church of Saint Porphyrius . SIR interviewed **Sister Nabila Saleh**, a nun from the congregation of the Sisters of the Rosary in Jerusalem. Sister Saleh has been serving in the Holy Family parish since the outbreak of the war between Hamas and Israel. Her words of "thanks" to the Pope echo those of all the displaced faithful.



"The war taken away even human dignity" she said. "The local population have been degraded to living like animals, or worse. My question is: what is the reason for so much cruelty? And the world remains silent." Echoing Pope Francis' words at Sunday's Angelus prayer, Sister Nabila added: "Is it possible that no one can stop this incessant cruelty against innocent civilians? Where are those who always speak of human rights and justice? The world's silence is deafening. Only Pope Francis has the courage to raise his voice against war, against all wars". Pope Francis has never ceased to express his closeness to the Christians of Gaza: "Every single day he calls the parish priest, Father Youssef Assad, he reassures us and tells us that he is praying for us, and we too are praying for him," affirms the nun. "All we can do is pray for an end to the war and the release of the hostages. And we do that every day."



) are air-dropping food along the coast, but it can be dangerous to get close. You risk being hit," she said.

Today, people in Gaza can die for a bag of flour.

Just look at the incidents of the last few days: more than 100 people were killed as crowds rushed towards trucks carrying humanitarian aid. According to UN Secretary-General **Antonio Guterres'** spokesperson, "nearly a thousand trucks are currently waiting to enter Gaza from the Egyptian border". "Aid restrictions in the north are costing lives - denounced **Adele Khodr**, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa - UNICEF and WFP malnutrition screenings in the north in January found that nearly 16 per cent - or 1 in 6 children under 2 years of age - are acutely malnourished. Similar screenings conducted in the south in Rafah, where aid has been more available, found 5 per cent of children under 2 years are acutely malnourished."



"The few makeshift markets here in northern Gaza have very few products. What little you can find - says Sister Nabila - is so expensive that no one can afford it. Some people have sold everything they had to scrape together some money, not to live, but to survive. Now people are eating anything they can find. This includes food and animal fodder. "It is the poor innocent people, the civilian population, who are paying the heaviest toll for this war, not others," the nun denounces. "Women, children, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, fathers with families, all carry the burden of grief on their shoulders. Everyone has lost everything. There is not a single family, not a single person who has not lost their home, their family, their job, their shop, their business. We have nothing left. In a word, we have lost our future." "What are we going to do? Who will do the reconstruction? What will become of all these poor people? These questions, those of Sister Nabila, are bound to remain unanswered. "Everyone wants to leave, but where to? Nobody wants to open their borders. The children tell us that they want to resume their normal lives, at school, at home. But they don't know that outside the parish there is nothing left, only rubble. **For them and for all of us, the parish has become our home, our church and our cemetery.** If we must die, we will die here in our parish."

Daniele Rocchi