

Israel and Hamas. Father Faltas (Custody): “Give peace a chance.” Appeal to allow the "Butterfly children" to leave Gaza

“The war that has been raging in the Holy Land for over seven months has killed 35,000 people. Another 10,000 bodies are buried under the rubble. More than 80,000 have been wounded. And there are countless others who suffer from invisible and irreparable trauma. These are huge numbers, but behind every 'number' there are stories of pain and of lives shattered to pieces. War is a tragedy for everyone, for those who cause it, for those who are subjected to it, for those who do nothing to stop it, using all possible actions and means”: Father **Ibrahim Faltas**, Vicar of the Custody of the Holy Land, who has consistently fought against the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas with the seemingly blunt weapons of dialogue, solidarity and denunciation,” said this emphatically to SIR.



[On Sunday 18 May, the Franciscan priest will travel to Verona on the occasion of the visit of Pope Francis. During his visit, the Pope will bless the "Christ of the Embrace", a huge 10-metre high statue weighing 44 quintals, made by a team of artists from the Veneto region. The statue will be transported to Jerusalem and placed on the terrace of the Holy Land School, which is directed by the Egyptian-born friar himself. "This statue," explains Father Faltas, "represents the Risen Christ embracing humanity and being embraced by humanity. It will be visible from the highest spot of the Holy Land School in Jerusalem, as a sign of the Holy City's and the world's desire for peace." "It is also a reminder that the arms trade is the main cause of wars. Ordinary people, children, the defenceless have no weapons, but they are the ones who suffer the devastating consequences of this trade."](#)



["Peace is not only the absence of war. Peace is a right and a duty," he stressed. "The right to peace is a fundamental human right, recognised by the international community through organisations whose mission is to ensure respect for each individual and to monitor compliance with international regulations". For the Vicar, "giving humankind the opportunity to live in peace is at the same time a duty of conscience, it is a permanent commitment to observe and respect international laws to ensure peace, wellbeing and stability". Therefore, "human society must remain vigilant to ensure the immediate removal of potential causes of conflict." During the past seven months of war, the Vicar of the Custody has received countless requests for help. He has also received an overwhelming amount of solidarity from people who want to help and give their support.](#)

["It's hard to remain silent in the face of those who ask for help and those who want to offer it".](#)

"Unfortunately," said Fr Faltas, "I have experienced the bitterness and frustration of not being allowed to bring out seriously ill children. They died waiting and hoping to be treated. I am still asking and pleading for permission to allow three children with Epidermolysis Bullosa, the so-called "Butterfly" children, to leave. In some of the videos I have seen them suffering for lack of adequate treatment and it pains me deeply to see that there is no prospect of getting them out of Gaza and into Italy to be treated by doctors and health workers who want to alleviate their suffering."



The Franciscan father said he feels powerless "in the face of violence, wherever it comes from, before the complicit silence of those who could contribute to peace and fail to do so. The silence of the 15,000 dead children, of the innocent victims of every war, of the nameless dead buried under the rubble, is a deafening silence that cries out for truth, for justice. But most of all, it is a cry for peace. This peace can only be achieved with the commitment of everyone, a commitment that is strong, active, constructive, never an accomplice to hatred, and respectful of life, of everyone's life". The Vicar of the Custody called upon "the powerful of the earth, on behalf of the fathers and mothers of Gaza, on behalf of the families of the Israeli and Palestinian hostages, to assume historical and humanitarian responsibility for what is happening in Rafah, where thousands of innocent people are suffering and risking their lives." "Let us give hope to those who have lost all hope. Let us pray for the whole world afflicted by the scourge of wars, let us pray to be peacemakers and bring the message of peace that our Lord Jesus taught us. No more war. Let us give peace a chance, let us give life a chance."

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