

---

## Golan Heights massacre. Catholic Ordinaries: “Abhorrent act of violence, abandon the path of arms”

An “abhorrent and unspeakable act of violence” that leaves in “deep grief all those who hold life sacred.” The members of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land (AOCTS), including the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal **Pierbattista Pizzaballa** and the Custos of the Holy Land, Father **Francesco Patton**) have condemned in the strongest terms last Saturday's attack on the Druze village of Majdal Shams in the Golan Heights, north of Israel. Twelve children playing on a football field were killed by a rocket with a 53-kilogram warhead. It is the highest Israeli civilian death toll since 7 October. Milad Muadad Al-Sha'ar, aged 10, was the youngest, the others were just slightly older. Thousands of people attended the funerals in the village on Sunday, accompanying the twelve coffins covered with white fabric, as is the custom of the Druze. The Israeli army immediately accused Hezbollah of having fired the rocket, a Falaq-1, according to investigations carried out immediately after the tragedy. Hezbollah, for its part, denied any involvement. As diplomatic efforts to find a solution to the conflict in Gaza, which is directly linked to nine months of clashes between Lebanese Hezbollah and the Israeli army, continue, the risk of an escalation of the conflict has increased. **“Innocent lives were taken.”** In their statement the Ordinaries decry the killing of “innocent lives, full of hopes and dreams”, that were “taken in an unspeakable act of violence. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims and to the entire Druze community in the Holy Land. The loss of these children is an unspeakable tragedy, leaving a profound impact on us all.” “Words cannot fully express the grief and indignation we feel in the face of such an abhorrent act of violence.” To honour the memory of these young victims, the prelates highlight the urgency of “renewing our commitment to peace and rejecting all forms of violence. The cycle of violence must end. We urge all parties to seek understanding and mutual respect, for the future of our children and communities depends on it. Enough with this violence, hatred, and contempt!” The Ordinaries make the following appeal: “We earnestly entreat all parties to abandon the path of conflict and arms, and to seek understanding and mutual respect. The future of children and the welfare of our communities hinge upon our ability to transcend hatred and to embrace the principles of compassion and coexistence.

Nothing will be resolved by the evil of arms and war!

Let us not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good! May the Lord grant comfort and strength to the families of the victims, and may their memories remind us of the preciousness of life and the urgent need for peace.” **The Druze.** The Druze community (non-Palestinian Arabs) in Israel comprises some 150,000 people living in more than 20 villages in the Golan Heights, of which Majdal Shams is one of the most important. The Druze are a distinct cultural, social and religious community. The Druze faith is a monotheistic religion derived from a branch of Islam, incorporating elements of Judaism and Christianity, as well as aspects of Greek philosophy and Hinduism. It is a faith closed to outsiders, which means that only the child of a Druze mother and a Druze father is considered Druze. A well-known aspect of its philosophy is the concept of ‘taqiyya’ that calls its members to be strongly loyal to the government of the country in which they live. The Druze soldiers sided with Jewish forces in the 1948 war and fought for Israel in every subsequent war. They are the only Arab group enrolled in the Israel Defence Forces and fully participate in Israel's border security and diplomatic corps.

Daniele Rocchi