

# On the escalation of violence in Israel and Palestine

*Declaration by the Association for the Twinning of Cologne and Bethlehem*

*It is, unfortunately, the bitter reality: 25 years after the twinning of Cologne and Bethlehem and the founding of the association to promote this relationship – under the then mayor of Cologne, Norbert Burger – instead of anniversary celebrations we are seeing renewed violence, distress, death and misery, in our two twin cities of Bethlehem and Tel Aviv-Yafo.*

This shocks us and worries us deeply. Our hearts go out to our friends in both cities.

Nothing can justify the rocket attacks launched by Hamas and Islamic Jihad from Gaza against Israeli cities, including our sister city Tel Aviv-Yafo. We condemn these attacks in the strongest terms.

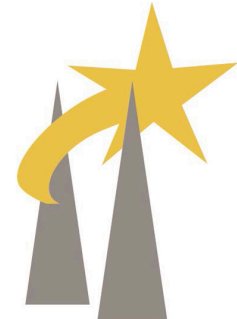
At the same time, we note that the recent escalation of the conflict did not start with the rockets fired from Gaza, but several months earlier with the forced eviction of Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem by Jewish settlers. The Israeli police responded to peaceful protests with provocation and disproportionate force. Israeli air strikes on civilian homes and facilities in Gaza added a new, no less inhumane dimension to this violence. We condemn these attacks equally strongly.

We also reject outright all attempts to use the current conflict to stir up anti-Semitism and aggression against people of Jewish faith in this

country. We must act together and not against each other, whatever our persuasion. There is no place for hatred and incitement to violence in relations between twin cities.

It is with growing concern, meanwhile, that we observe the increasing use of misdirected accusations of anti-Semitism as a propaganda weapon in public and political discourse. This involves the defamation of people, associations and institutions which, in good faith, call the occupation by its name, criticize as illegal under international law the policies of occupation and colonization of the Palestinian territories by Netanyahu's nationalist right-wing government, and are committed to a peaceful outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a two-State solution. Such accusations do a disservice to the urgent societal struggle against anti-Semitism.

We look on with horror at the violence between Palestinians in Israel and Jewish Israelis in the country's heartland, which increasingly bears the traits of civil war. Institutions such as the Cologne Peace Kindergarten in the



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## Statement from the editorial office

Deaths: 12, including 2 children on the Israeli side; deaths: 254, including 66 children on the Palestinian side. The latest armed conflict between Palestinians and Israelis lasted eleven days, from 10 to 21 May 2021. According to the "New York Times", 34,000 Palestinians had to flee. Over 2500 people were bombed homeless. Thank goodness a ceasefire was agreed with the help of Egypt. However, hardship, fear of renewed bombing and suffering are not yet over. If France and Germany have succeeded in finding peace after many terrible wars, Israeli and Palestinians should also be able to approach each other. Many of them are doing it

already. Obviously, there are talks on prisoner exchanges.

What is needed from the outside is an understanding for both sides, a politically clear condemnation of any warlike actions, as well as pronouncements and support from e.g. the "Declaration of the Association for the Promotion of the Town Twinning Cologne-Bethlehem". Not a renewed armament by the unashamedly profit-making arms industry – whichever side – but the pursuit of UN Security Council Resolution 242 to bring about a just and lasting peace. This 1967 resolution wisely provides for the creation of "demilitarised zones" and not rearmament of Israel and Palestine.

Jaffa district of Tel Aviv, where children from Jewish, Muslim and Christian families alike play, sing and celebrate together, are thus more necessary than ever.

We must not give in to a feeling of helplessness in the face of the still unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the contrary: the fundamental trilateral impulse that gave birth to the twinning with Bethlehem must be urgently reactivated. Only people who show empathy and solidarity with both sides can, as outsiders to the con-

flict, help build a peaceful and better future in the region. This is the encouraging experience we have had during the 25 years of partnership between Cologne and Bethlehem.

We shall therefore continue to support initiatives in Bethlehem and Tel Aviv-Yafo that promote dialogue and cooperation, the protection of human rights and a peaceful end to the occupation, which has now lasted for 54 years.

*Source: [www.koeln-bethlehem.de](http://www.koeln-bethlehem.de), undated  
(Translation «Swiss Standpoint»)*