

STATEMENT ON ISRAEL'S INTERCEPTION OF GAZA BOUND FLOTILLA

June 4, 2010

The May 31 Israeli commando attack on a flotilla carrying more than 600 pro-Palestinian activists, which left at least nine passengers dead and injured dozens of the activists and six soldiers, is morally unconscionable. The activists may have been inviting a fight with Israel over its sustained blockade of Gaza; for its part, Israel stated the goods could have been delivered through legitimate humanitarian channels. What transpired resulted in a useless loss of life.

Violence, particularly of such disproportionate force, is intolerable, all the more so in international waters, and will only serve to intensify the already volatile political situation in the Middle East.

No one interested in peace in the Holy Land seeks to vindicate the Islamic militant group Hamas, which has held sway in Gaza since 2007 and is sworn to Israel's destruction. Without question, Israel has a right to its existence. At the same time, the sustained imprisonment of 1.5 million Palestinian residents there, for whom the flotilla sought to bring 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid, deserves better treatment - diplomatic, negotiated, and non-violent action - than what occurred in the botched flotilla raid, which has been deplored by the Vatican and has evoked widespread international condemnation both in the Arab world and in Europe.

Voices at the UN Security Council were rightly raised on Memorial Day against the sustained Israeli blockade of Gaza, which intensifies the poverty of the Gaza residents and inhibits their rebuilding efforts following last year's devastating Israeli offensive. The flotilla attempt and attack were particularly distasteful, coming, as they did, in the Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel.

In his Encyclical Letter, *Pacem in Terris*, Blessed Pope John XXIII reminded us that "any disputes between nations must be resolved by negotiations and agreement, and not by recourse to arms." At his General Audience last Wednesday, Pope Benedict XVI said in reference to the Israeli-Palestinian altercation: "Violence does not resolve conflict but only increases its tragic consequences and generates more violence."

The Vatican Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* remarked that peace "is not merely the absence of war, nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship." The bishops at the Council also said they "cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties, too."

Let us join in ardent prayer that the indirect negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel will continue, and that an eventual Israeli-Palestinian peace accord will not be disrupted by this latest most unfortunate development.