Blog



Smoke rises amid destroyed buildings in the Gaza Strip as seen from Israel's border with the Gaza Strip in southern Israel Oct. 18. (OSV News/Reuters/Amir Cohen)



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October 23, 2023

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***Editor's note**: Global Sisters Report's Monday Starter is a feature from GSR staff writers that rounds up news from or about women religious that you may otherwise have missed.*



Several women religious congregations and organizations released a statement on Oct. 20 urging the Biden administration to publicly call for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The statement condemns the Oct. 7 deadly attacks and taking of hostages by Hamas, as well as Israel's retaliation that has hit the people of Gaza. The organizations urge President Joe Biden to "publicly call for de-escalation, humanitarian ceasefire, and restraint by all sides," as well as calling on all parties to "prioritize the establishment of corridors for humanitarian aid" for the people in Gaza and take steps to "secure immediate release of hostages."

"If we continue to send weapons to this conflict, we will increase the dehumanization, destruction, and trauma of all communities involved," the statement says. "Yes, everyone has a right to defense. Yet, how we choose to defend can either perpetuate cycles of violence and trauma, or it can break cycles of violence and trauma. Now is the time to call for de-escalation and ceasefire, before more lives are lost and the conflict spreads."

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious signed the statement, along with organizations including Pax Christi USA, Nuns Against Gun Violence and Franciscan Action Network, as well as several congregations.

The Adrian Dominican Sisters also joined the call for peace in the Middle East, citing Pope Francis' hope for a "meek and holy force" of prayer to end the violence.

"More than 1,400 children, women and men were massacred in a horrific attack by Hamas last week. Israeli airstrikes against Hamas in the Gaza Strip are now

estimated to have killed more than 2,800 Palestinians, including children, women and men," the statement says. "Fighting along the northern border of Israel has escalated. The Israeli blockade of food, water and electricity in Gaza has created a humanitarian crisis for more than 2 million inhabitants of the 140 square-mile area. At least 199 Israeli children, women and men, including foreigners, are still being held hostage by Hamas."

" 'Prayer is the meek and holy force to oppose the diabolical force of hatred, terrorism, and war,' Pope Francis said," the statement continues. "Let us all join in this meek and holy force of global prayer today for a resolution to this dire and escalating conflict that restores God's justice, love, and peace in the Holy Land and in the hearts of all the children of Abraham."

The congregation held a Rosary Prayer for Peace in its motherhouse on Oct. 17.

The International Union of Superiors General echoed the call of the Bishops of the Holy Land for a day of fasting and prayer on Oct. 17, calling it a ray of hope in a moment of deep concern and sorrow.

"This is a time when we want to come together as a global community, praying together for a world where peace prevails over violence, justice over discord, and reconciliation over hatred," their statement said. "United in prayer, we can bring our desire for peace and justice to God the Father. Let us join this initiative and continue to pray for a peaceful and better world for all."



St. Joseph Sr. Helen Prejean speaks at a Sept. 22 New York City event on the opera "Dead Man Walking," based on her best-selling memoir. Prejean has sued the Louisiana Board of Pardons, challenging a change in how the state considers whether to commute death sentences to life in prison. (Fordham University/Jim Anness)

Sr. Helen Prejean sues Louisiana Board of Pardons

St. Joseph Sr. Helen Prejean, in the news recently for the Metropolitan Opera premiere of the opera based on her memoir*, *Dead Man Walking*, is also in the news for suing the Louisiana Board of Pardons.

The Deseret News reports Prejean has waded into a political and legal battle taking place in Louisiana between the Democratic governor, who wants to end the death penalty in his state, and the Republican who has won election to succeed him and who wants to continue executing inmates.

Under the Louisiana Constitution, the governor can issue a stay of execution, but cannot commute death sentences to life in prison — that requires approval by the Board of Pardons. Gov. John Bel Edwards has asked the board to consider 56 commutations, the newspaper reported, but state attorney general and gubernatorial candidate Jeff Landry sued to stop the process.

That led to a deal where the board would hold administrative reviews of the petitions instead of full-blown hearings, a move that makes any hearings happen after Edwards leaves office and is unable to approve any commutations the board recommends. Landry, The Guardian reports, has argued for reintroducing the electric chair, hangings and firing squads.

Enter Prejean.

Prejean's lawsuit alleges the administrative reviews violate the state's open meetings law, which requires government bodies to act in public instead of behind closed doors.

"Because the meeting was held in violation of the Open Meetings Law, it has deprived me of a chance to voice my opinion on these life-or-death considerations," Prejean said on X, the site formerly called Twitter, the Deseret News reported. "I ask the courts to order openness and transparency in this life-or-death process and let the 56 people on death row have their chance to plead their cases for the clemency of life in prison."

If Prejean's lawsuit prevails, the board would be required to hold public hearings on the petitions, but time is of the essence: Hearings require 60 days notice, and Edwards leaves office Jan. 8.

Advertisement

Salesians work to provide education, training to women in poverty

More than 340 million women and girls will live in extreme poverty by 2030 and close to 1 in 4 will experience moderate or severe food insecurity, according to the recent "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023" report released by UN Women and the United Nations Department on Economic and Social Affairs.

The gender gap in power and leadership positions remains entrenched, and, at the current rate of progress, the next generation of women will still spend on average 2.3 more hours per day on unpaid care and domestic work than men, the U.N. reports.

Salesian missionaries — priests, brothers and sisters, as well as laypeople — working in more than 130 countries are working to counter that trend through programs targeted specifically for young women and girls. These programs provide opportunities for education and training that lead to employment with livable wages.

"Education is the key to helping women out of poverty," said Fr. Timothy Ploch, interim director of Salesian Missions. "Salesian missionaries provide programs that ensure girls and young women have equal access to education and the supports they need to graduate and find stable employment. These programs work to help women achieve long-term self-sustainability and include nutritional and health services as well as workforce development activities."

**The original version of this story has been corrected to note that it was the Metropolitan Opera's premiere of the "Dead Man Walking" opera.*