News



U.S. Marines stand guard as demonstrators protest against the United States joining with Israel in attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities, at a federal building in Los Angeles, Calif., June 22. (OSV News/Reuters/David Swanson)



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Amid a shaky truce between Israel and Iran announced June 23 by President Donald Trump, Catholic sisters long active in peace and antinuclear movements continue to support nonviolent solutions to the fragile situation in the Middle East region.

Before the June 23 announcement, several sisters decried the June 21 U.S. attack on Iranian nuclear development sites as immoral and illegal, saying it would do nothing to achieve peace between the U.S. and Iran and between Israel and Iran.

One of the sisters, Sr. Kathleen Kanet, a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary and a longtime New York peace activist, said on June 24 nothing that had happened in the two days after the attack had changed her mind that the U.S. targeting Iran was wrong and unnecessary.

"I am ashamed and sorrowful of this sin," she said, "and appalled by the affirmation [of Trump's actions] by so many. What happened to dialogue and deliberation with 'the other?' "

Similarly, Dominican Sr. Carol Gilbert, a veteran antinuclear activist, said June 24 she is praying that "it is a ceasefire that lasts."

She also said that both houses of Congress need to affirm their right to declare war.

> 'I don't feel any safer. If anything, this makes us less safe.'
> —Sr. Carol Gilbert
>
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Kanet said new violence is always possible and threats of more military action are "very concerning."

"Violence begets violence, and war is never the answer," she said. "I shall pray that I respond only in nonviolent ways to this new horror put upon us by ignorant and unholy people."

On June 24, Trump expressed frustration with both Iran and Israel, saying he was not happy with either side for apparent violations of the ceasefire.

However, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed the news of a ceasefire, urging Iran and Israel "to respect it fully," he said on social media.

"The fighting must stop. The people of the two countries have already suffered too much."

While the state of the situation in Israel and Iran remained uncertain and in flux, Kanet and other sisters said the United States' June 21 attack in Iran was wrong.

"The U.S. just launched an illegal war of aggression," Gilbert told Global Sisters Report June 22, the day after the U.S. bombing. On June 23, Iran fired missiles at a U.S. military base in Qatar.

In ordering the June 21 bombing, Trump did not have the approval of either Congress or the United Nations, Gilbert said. As a result, she said, the U.S. action violated the Constitution, international law through the Nuremberg Principles, and other treaties the U.S. has signed.

Given those concerns, Gilbert believes Trump should be impeached. She said that Trump acquiesced to what she called Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's wish to pull the U.S. "into Israel's reckless and illegal war" of attacking Iran.

Gilbert fears "another forever war," and said she disagrees with arguments that striking Iran makes the world safer.

"I don't feel any safer," Gilbert said. "If anything, this makes us less safe."

Sr. Barbara Bozak, United Nations representative for the Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph, told GSR she believes that while Trump "now says he is willing to negotiate for peace, one cannot expect Iran to seek peace after the aggression by the U.S. War never begets peace. War and violence beget more violence and war."

Rosemarie Pace, the coordinator of Pax Christi in New York state, quoted a June 2024 address Pope Francis delivered on the 10th anniversary of the Invocation for Peace in the Holy Land.

"Peace is not made only by written agreements or by human and political compromises," the late pontiff said. "It is born from transformed hearts, and arises when each of us has encountered and been touched by God's love, which dissolves

our selfishness, shatters our prejudices and grants us the taste and joy of friendship, fraternity and mutual solidarity.

"There can be no peace if we do not let God first disarm our hearts, making them hospitable, compassionate and merciful. God is hospitable, compassionate and merciful."



Smoke during a missile attack from Iran on Israel, amid the Iran-Israel conflict, in Tel Aviv, Israel, June 22. (OSV News/Reuters/Violeta Santos Moura)

Gilbert, a Dominican Sister of Grand Rapids, said all must work "to try and build a path to peace." She said Congress should pass a war resolution act and also try to halt congressional approval of a federal spending bill that calls for Pentagon budget increases she said will be paid for by cuts to the social safety net for poor and middle-income persons.

Gilbert, whose ministry is based in Washington, D.C., said she will be lobbying Congress this week.

The sisters' condemnation of the Trump action was echoed by antinuclear groups, including the Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, or ICAN, which is based in Geneva.

"By joining Israel's attack on Iran, the U.S. is also breaking international law," Melissa Parke, ICAN's executive director, said in a June 22 statement: "By joining Israel's attack on Iran, the U.S. is also breaking international law. Military action against Iran is not the way to resolve concerns over Tehran's nuclear program. Given that US intelligence agencies assess Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons, this is a senseless and reckless act that could undermine international efforts to prevent the further proliferation of nuclear weapons."

Parke said in the statement the U.S. "should have continued to pursue the diplomatic process underway before Israel resorted to the illegal use of force. This does not make the region or the world safer. It makes it more dangerous."

She added: "Striking nuclear installations is explicitly banned under international law and risks causing radioactive contamination harmful to human health and the environment. The U.S. must stop all military action and return to the diplomatic path."

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Similarly, Guterres told the U.N. Security Council in an emergency meeting on June 22 that "the bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities by the United States marks a perilous turn in a region that is already reeling."

"The people of the region cannot endure another cycle of destruction," he said. "And yet, we now risk descending into a rathole of retaliation after retaliation."

Guterres added: "We must act — immediately and decisively — to halt the fighting and return to serious, sustained negotiations on the Iran nuclear program."

The world, he said, faces "a stark choice. One path leads to wider war, deeper human suffering, and serious damage to the international order. The other leads to de-escalation, diplomacy and dialogue. We know which path is right."