IJCIC repudiates charge of Israeli genocide

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November 22, 2024. In light of the recent controversy arising from a comment by Pope Francis recorded in Hernán Reyes Alcaide's "Hope Never Disappoints: Pilgrims Toward a Better World", the International Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), the body representing the organized Jewish community in its interactions with the leadership of world religions, including the Vatican, finds it necessary to respond to the charge that Israel may be engaged in genocide in Gaza.

First and foremost, this charge, as we shall explain, is categorically false. To grant it any credibility is deeply problematic and objectionable. Doing so serves only to frustrate any resolution of the conflict and fuels an already out of control global antisemitism. Let us turn to a brief summary of the reasons why the suggestion that Israel may be guilty of genocide should be thoroughly dismissed.

1. Legal Definition of Genocide

Under the 1948 Genocide Convention, genocide means actions such as killing, causing serious harm, or imposing measures to destroy a group but only when "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." While many noncombatants have been killed in Gaza by the Israel Defense Forces, Israel's political and military have stated consistently that the goal of the war is not to eliminate the Palestinian people as a national group; its intent is to combat Hamas. This is an Israel-Hamas war, not an Israel-Gazan war or Israel-Palestinian war. Critically, high civilian casualties in and of themselves do not constitute genocide. The loss of any innocent person is a tragedy. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that the ratio of the death and injury of civilians to combatants in this war is amongst the lowest in modern warfare, including World War I, World War II and the Korean War.

2. Military Objectives and Self Defense

The Israeli government's goals are defensive in nature and include the return of the hostages kidnapped and abused on October 7, 2023, the securing of the safety of its civilian population, and the neutralizing of Hamas's leadership and the elimination of its rocket launch sites, weapon stockpiles, and tunnels. Hamas is recognized internationally as a terrorist organization whose stated goal is the violent elimination of the State of Israel and is therefore a legitimate military target. These operations are not an endeavor to eradicate Palestinians. Civilian casualties are not the goal and are an undesirable and lamentable tragedy of war.

Hamas is an existential threat due to its stated goal of Israel's destruction. Israel's military actions are consistent with the right of self-defense under international law. In addition to the massacre, rapes, violence, and kidnapping of October 7, 2023, Hamas has launched, and continues to launch, thousands of rockets at Israeli civilian areas from Gaza and Hamas has built tunnels for potential attacks. These threats necessitate Israeli military action.

3. Population Trends

The population of Gaza has grown considerably from approximately 300,000 in 1967 to over 2, 300,000 today. This population growth is the opposite of a campaign of genocide. Most significantly, actual genocidal campaigns kill a high percentage of the targeted group. The Turks murdered 80% of Armenians, the Nazis murdered 67% of European Jews in the Holocaust, and the Hutus killed 85% of the Tutsi people in Rwanda. In stark contrast, the war In Gaza has killed fewer than 2% of Gazans. There is no evidence of the murder of all or most Gazans.

4.Evacuation Warnings

Israel makes significant efforts to minimize civilian casualties by warning them about imminent attacks and has designated humanitarian areas. These measures are inconsistent with genocidal intent.

5. Aid to Gaza

Israel has enabled the transfer of such humanitarian aid as food and medical supplies into Gaza. This is inconsistent with genocidal intent. Unfortunately, such aid is often stolen or hijacked in Gaza before it reaches the vulnerable population for which it is intended.

6. Hamas Responsibility for Civilian Harm

Hamas deliberately places military assets in civilian areas such as schools, hospitals, and residential neighborhoods; launches rockets from civilian sites; and prevents civilians from evacuating conflict zones. This provokes civilian casualties and garners international condemnation of Israel.

Due to the nature of urban warfare, i.e., the dense civilian population and Hamas's tactics, it is challenging for Israel to avoid civilian casualties although it works hard to do so.

7. The Larger Picture

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is part of a larger struggle over land, resources, and self-determination; it is not an intentional effort to eradicate an ethnic or religious group.

8. Israel's Internal Diversity

Approximately 20% of Israel's population are Arab citizens who participate in society as voters, politicians, and professionals. This disproves any genocidal intent toward Arabs or the Palestinian people.

9. Humanitarian Efforts and Ceasefire Offers

Israel's participation in repeated ceasefire negotiations indicates a willingness to halt violence, inconsistent with genocidal intent.

Source: Religion News Service.

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