

Holy Land Custodian Emphasizes War's Human Factor

Says All Talk Is of Borders and Territories

JERUSALEM, JAN. 12, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Human life is relegated to a second plane in discussions of the Middle East, warns the Custodian of the Holy Land, while talk of territories and borders dominates the discussion.

Franciscan Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa made these comments on Vatican Radio this month, and expressed gratitude to Benedict XVI "for his very close and concrete concern to attract everyone to this reality, which is truly deteriorating and lacerating people's lives."

The custodian referred to the Holy Father's homily Jan. 1, solemnity of Mary, Mother of God and World Day of Peace, in which the Pope highlighted the "dramatic situation that characterizes precisely that land where Jesus was born," and that peace is promoted by respecting the human person.

The Pontiff asked: "In order to be lasting, a peace agreement must be based on respect for the dignity and rights of every person."

Father Pizzaballa said Benedict XVI's emphasis on the person is a "very important affirmation, especially here, in the Middle East, in the Holy Land, where there is very often talk of borders, areas and territories, but people, perhaps involuntarily, are relegated to the second plane."

"If we thought first of all of the need of the person, of every person, perhaps the solutions would be closer," the Franciscan custodian suggested.

The conflict in the Holy Land "involves the lives of all people, Israelis and Palestinians," continued the Franciscan minister provincial in the Middle East.

He added: "Objectively, the Palestinians suffer more than any one else, because of the economic situation, the internal divisions and the absence of a state.

"But violence also strikes the Israelis indirectly: It is a situation that really exhausts the lives of almost all the families of this country."

Troubled region

Benedict XVI turned his attention again to the Middle East in his address Monday to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, in which he referred to the region as a "source of great concerns."

The Pope added: "I renew my urgent appeal to all parties involved in the region's complex political chessboard, with the hope that they will consolidate the positive signs between Israelis and Palestinians, witnessed in recent weeks. The Holy

See will never tire of repeating that armed solutions achieve nothing."

Father Pizzaballa, in comments to SIR news agency of the Italian episcopate, said that "the Pope's appeals for a just and peaceful solution of the conflicts in this land, as well as for the conditions of Christians living here, are stronger than ever."

"It is a warning to the international community to mobilize urgently. The Pope reminded that peace in the world is also linked to the solution of conflicts in the Middle East."

The custodian added: "It is true that there are timid signs of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, but they are still too lukewarm. The situation continues to be tense and the crisis also seems to be extending to countries of the region, such as Iran.

"If a radical change in direction is not detected, the crisis might degenerate. The Pope has understood this well, and always reminds us of it."

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