
Israel and Hamas. Card. Pizzaballa on hostage deal: “We are hoping for a positive development” Patton (Custos): “Now humanitarian aid for civilians”

At the end of a long night of deliberations, the Israeli cabinet, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, approved the deal brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States for the release of hostages in the war between Israel and Hamas. It is the first diplomatic achievement since the war broke out on 7 October. The decision to approve the deal with Hamas came after a long late-night session chaired by the Israeli prime minister and involving the war cabinet, the security council and the government. The deal provides for the release of 50 hostages, all Israelis or dual nationals - 30 minors with 8 mothers and 12 women - in exchange for a 4-day military ceasefire and the release of 150 Palestinians (1 Israeli per 3 Palestinians), mostly women and minors, who are not serving sentences for terrorism. A list of 300 Palestinian prisoners who could be released was published by the Israeli Ministry of Justice. The hostages are to be released starting tomorrow at a rate of 12-13 a day until all 50 have been freed. The ceasefire could be extended if more hostages are released - Hamas and Islamic Jihad are holding at least 240. The deal includes the delivery of 300 truckloads of humanitarian aid to Gaza via Egypt. **Reactions.** The international community reacted with unanimous approval. The deal “gives some hope to the devastated families in Israel and some respite to Palestinians in Gaza,” writes **Roberta Metsola**, President of the European Parliament, on X, while **Ursula von der Leyen**, President of the European Commission, welcomed the agreement and said: “The European Commission will do its utmost to use this pause for a humanitarian surge into Gaza.” US President **Joe Biden** welcomed the deal in a statement released by international media. He thanked “Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani of Qatar and President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt for their critical partnership in reaching this deal.” Biden expressed gratitude that the hostages would soon be reunited with their families. China “welcomed the temporary ceasefire agreement” and expressed hope that it “will help alleviate the humanitarian crisis and reduce tension”, through the words of Foreign Ministry spokeswoman **Mao Ning**. **The voice of the local Church.** Satisfaction with this first diplomatic breakthrough was also expressed by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. In a brief statement released to SIR, the Latin Patriarch, Cardinal **Pierbattista Pizzaballa**, said: “We welcome the news and hope that it will lead to further positive steps towards an end to the conflict.” Contacted by SIR, the Custos of the Holy Land, Father **Francesco Patton**, likewise welcomed the “good news.” “The agreement between Hamas and Israel is a step in the direction that Pope Francis has been calling for for many weeks now – he said -. We hope that this truce will now be effective both in securing the release of the hostages and in providing a respite and relief to the civil population of Gaza from the devastating impact of the ongoing conflict”. “A ceasefire,” he added, “is only a brief respite, but it is our hope that a political solution to this situation will be reached to bring peace between Israel and Palestine - a solution that recognises the right of Israeli and Palestinian citizens to live in security and dignity in their respective States”. From Bethlehem in the West Bank, where clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli army, resulting in deaths and injuries, have continued since the outbreak of the war, Sister **Fayeza Ayad**, of the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart, expressed the hope that “the deal may silence the guns and pave the way for dialogue and mutual understanding”. It was clear that some progress was being made, she said, “because the day before yesterday morning, for the first time since the war began, Israel allowed many teachers working in Jerusalem to pass through the Rachel's Tomb checkpoint. A very positive sign.”