

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have gratefully listened to expert comment on legal aspects of recent legislation promoting the death penalty for Palestinian prisoners.

But any evaluation of real situations requires more than careful analysis of legislation. It requires us to pay close attention to the underlying culture that would express itself in such legislation – the attitudes and agendas underneath.

That's why this webinar does well to combine concern over that legislation with the wider concern to "protect Palestinian life under occupation".

Israel's right to defend itself is *not* in question. But

- obstructing medical supplies, and blocking the evacuation of sick people in need of urgent medical help;
- the targeting of paramedics, journalists, and children seeking food;
- the displacement of populations, and official recognition of the "settlements";
- to say nothing of mockery of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers – all on film – go well beyond the requirements of self-defence.

They reveal a militaristic, racist and power-based culture (even if that description applies to only part of a population) – nevertheless, a culture that can only be deeply troubling to all who hope for a future that is respectful of the human dignity and human rights of both peoples. *Both* stand to lose.

Which brings me to another cultural distortion: namely, the creeping acceptance of transition from rule-based international order to rule by power. The imposition of the death penalty on a weaker power (without adequate due process) is a further symptom of that movement towards power-based subjugation replacing rule-based order.

I respectfully suggest that other nations of the Western world need to consider whether their failure to impose significant sanctions on those who have been violating international and humanitarian law – with impunity - amounts to complicity.

It seems unbelievable that people can allow themselves to be duped by the dishonest claim that criticism of Israel's excesses equates to anti-Semitism.

Neither Israel, nor the rest of the world, need anti-Semitism - *and for that same reason* – no one needs the atrocities which bring about an upsurge of anti-Semitism.

History clearly shows that all empires based on the rule of power ultimately self-degrade, because that way of living doesn't match what it means to be authentically human.

There is simply no substitute for an ethic based ultimately on the meaning, dignity and destiny of human nature. That belongs to the *givenness* of *being human*.

But it is also a task; a calling to work together, in respectful dialogue, to make all of human life *more authentically* human.

That, in turn, can only come out of a *radically different culture* – the one beautifully described by Pope Benedict XVI in these words: I quote:

On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the *earthly city* according to law and justice.

On the other hand, charity also transcends justice, and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving.

The *earthly city* is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion..." (Pope Benedict, Caritas in Veritate.)

Hopefully, the God-given dignity of every person, *which no circumstances, and no personal wrong-doing*, can ever cancel, may still be common ground enough, for us to always give that way of living another try.