



Seeking Just Peace for Palestinians and Israelis – Resource for the World Day of Prayer

February 2024

The World Day of Prayer takes place on 1 March. Each year, a different country is chosen to be prayed for. For 2024, Palestine is the country selected. Resources for the day can be downloaded from <https://www.wwdp.org.uk/2024-wdp-free-resources-to-download/>. Additional resources about Palestine can be found at the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network site <https://pien.org.au/resources/>. The following sheet is intended to supplement the resources for the World Day of Prayer with a focus on the current mass killings in Gaza and highlighting the seeds for a just peace.

World Day of Prayer is an international, inter-church organisation led by women that enables us to hear the thoughts of those women from all parts of the world: their hopes, concerns, and prayers. The Day of Prayer is celebrated in over 146 countries.

Current Situation in Gaza

Following the horrific act of mass murder carried out by Hamas on 7 October 2023, which resulted in the estimated deaths of 1,168 Israelis and foreigners, the wounding of over 5,400 and the abduction of over 200, the Israeli Government launched an attack on Gaza with the stated aim of destroying Hamas.

The Israeli attack on Gaza has seen the massive use of force that has left the Palestinian civilian population devastated. According to the international development organisation Action Aid, the months of intense bombing and shelling have left more than 25,000 Palestinians dead. While thousands of these will have been Palestinians who have taken up arms, including some who were involved in the 7 October attack, an estimated 70% of those killed by Israeli forces have been women and children. UNICEF has pointed out that the Palestinian women killed by Israeli forces have come from all walks of life, including journalists, medical staff, UN personnel and members of civil society organisations.

It is estimated that 1.9 million Palestinians in Gaza have been driven from their homes. That is 85% of the population of Gaza.

It is further estimated that 60% of the homes in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged since the Israeli attack.

The health system in Gaza has collapsed. Diseases such as diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections will take the lives of thousands more Palestinians even if the fighting stops.



Palestinian Christians are not spared from human rights abuses carried out by Israeli security forces. On 16 December 2023, Israeli troops gunned down a mother and daughter, Nahida and Samar, inside the Holy Family Parish in Gaza. One was shot dead while trying to carry the other to safety. The parish is a sanctuary for many Christian families. Seven other people were injured in the attack.

On the same day, an Israeli tank shelled the Convent of the Sisters of Mother Theresa, part of the same church compound. The attack destroyed the compound's generator, its only electricity source, and vital fuel supplies. The attack had a dire impact on the 54 disabled residents of the convent, who were made homeless without access to necessary medical equipment. Some no longer had access to respirators critical to their survival.



Groups Committed to Seeking a Lasting Peace

There are Palestinian Christian groups that are seeking a just and lasting peace. In 2002, the Synod of Victoria and Tasmanian meeting aligned itself with the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre. Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, its liberation theology seeks to deepen Palestinian Christians' faith, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and peace. Resources from Sabeel can be downloaded from <https://sabeel.org/>

God of light, you dwell with those who are crucified by weapons, public policy and social indifference. We are not able to know the true extent of what our Palestinian siblings are going through in Gaza but trust that you, O Lord, know intimately every single tear and cry. Hear the cry of the oppressed; deliver us from the many forms of oppression. Lord, we remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Help us learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). Lord, in your mercy ... hear our prayer.

From a prayer by Sabeel from 25 January 2024

Kairos Palestine is a Palestinian Christian movement that advocates for ending the Israeli occupation and achieving a just solution to the conflict. They ask all churches and Christians to stand against injustice and work for a just peace. They have declared that the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity. They advocate that non-violent resistance to the injustice of the Israeli military occupation is a right and duty for all Palestinians, including Christians. Resources from Kairos Palestine can be downloaded from <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/>

There are groups of Israelis and Palestinians working together for peace, such as Standing Together, Parents Circle – Families Forum and Peace Now. However, they have yet to attract mass support. In 2003, Ami Ayalon, a former head of the Israeli secret service Shin Bet, and Palestinian leader Sari Nusseibeh launched a People's Voice peace initiative that collected the support of 251,000 Israelis and 160,000 Palestinians by 2008.

The World Council of Churches also runs an Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (WCC EAPPI). It was created in 2002 by the WCC in response to a letter and an appeal from local church leaders to create an international presence in the country. EAPPI provides a continuous presence of 25-30 Ecumenical Accompaniers, who serve in the field for three months, accompanying local people and communities, offering a protective presence, and witnessing their daily struggles and hopes. More than 2000 Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) have served through the programme, and many of them have stayed involved and interested in working toward a just peace in Palestine and Israel. More details on the programme can be found at www.eappi.org.



Pathway to Just Peace

It would seem the only pathway to meaningful peace and security is when the majority on both sides conclude that violence must be renounced, but that is not the only factor needed. As Iain King, who was involved in the Northern Ireland peace process, has argued, with clear implications for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict:

First, it was clear by the 1990s that none of the protagonists would capitulate or be fully defeated; as a result, a compromise was the only way to end the violence. To make such an outcome sustainable in the long run, it was not just the elites who needed to be satisfied but also the communities they represented. The identity of rival groups, including their sense of dignity and their treasured symbols, had to be respected; historic



grievances had to be acknowledged; and systematic imbalances in power and representation had to be addressed. Everybody had to be given an incentive to support the deal. The agreement had to be inclusive and offer far more than just an end to violence.

The United States Institute for Peace also concluded that the involvement of moderate religious leaders was critical to securing peace in Northern Ireland and that a similar role is needed to end the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Barriers to Peace

Both Israelis and Palestinians have carried out atrocities and acts of brutality against each other over many decades. These acts continue to provide fuel for the conflict and a sense of justification for those committed to extreme violence on both sides. However, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of Palestinians and Israelis would prefer to be able to get on with their lives in peace if the violence could be brought to an end.

However, the actions of the Israeli Government are vital to finding a just and lasting peace. Jewish dialogue facilitator Adam Kahane was involved in bringing Israeli leaders together to try and reach a shared vision of their future. In his 2010 book “Power and Love. A Theory and Practice of Social Change”, he points out the difficulty of reaching a peaceful and just settlement to a conflict when there is a strong asymmetry of power. He states:

The stronger party – which in the Israel-Palestine case is Israel – always has the option of enforcing its own solution rather than accepting a mutually agreed solution.

In his 2020 book “Friendly Fire. How Israel became its own worst enemy”, the former head of the Israeli secret service agency, Shin Bet, Ami Ayalon, outlines how successive Israeli Governments undermined the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords. While the Palestinian Liberation Organisation worked with Shin Bet to suppress and curb terrorist attacks by Palestinian Islamic extremists, Israeli Governments continued to expand settlements in the Occupied Territories. He wrote (page 151):

I had begun to see that more bypass roads, military outposts, and settlements would eventually destroy any hope of a two-state solution. If we kept up the building, before too long, the Palestinians would conclude we had no intention of ending the occupation and allowing a Palestinian state alongside Israel. This would inevitably lead to the loss of hope and the triumph of terror.

He also pointed out that Palestinian terrorist attacks favour the election of right-wing Israeli parties committed to ongoing war. In response to Palestinian terrorism, Israeli “voters turned to the right. When fear took over because of terror, we voted in leaders who promised to kill the enemy, not those who promised a better, more just world.”

Further, most governments respond to terrorism through law enforcement. Police gather evidence and arrest suspects. Terrorists are brought to trial and sent to prison. Instead, successive Israeli Governments have often resorted to extrajudicial executions of suspected terrorists. Such assassinations are even carried out in other countries, violating the laws of those countries. Ami Ayalon casually talks about the decades in which extrajudicial executions have often been used as an Israeli Government response terrorism.

In addition, when members of the Israeli army or police kill unarmed Palestinians, they are rarely sanctioned. Even when brought to trial and found guilty, the sentences from Israeli courts are often very light. Palestinians can be subject to indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial. Human rights organisations also report that some Palestinian detainees continue to be subjected to severe beatings. Thus, many Palestinians understandably believe there is one law for Jews in Israel and another for Palestinians.



Defence of Children International Palestine documented 781 cases of Palestinian children killed by Israeli soldiers, police, settlers and security guards between 2011 and 2020. The Synod Justice and International Mission Cluster advocated in four cases of alleged extrajudicial executions of Palestinian children raised by Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem between 2020 and 2022.

The World Council of Churches expressed concern that 50 journalists had been killed by Israeli soldiers and police since 2000. There had not been a single case where an Israeli soldier was held to account for killing a Palestinian journalist.

It is impossible to see how peace would be possible until Israeli Governments provide equality before the law for Palestinians and end the use of human rights violations in response to the threat of terrorism.

Australian Government Position

On her visit to the Middle East in mid-January 2024, the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Penny Wong, stated that:

Our view is that peace ultimately will come if there is genuine progress towards peace and security for Israel and for the Palestinian people and their legitimate aspirations for statehood.

Minister Wong also spoke out against Israeli settlements in the West Bank, stating, "We have said as a government we believe settlements are contrary to international law. We've also consistently said that they are an impediment to peace."

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

Senator The Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT, 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Points to make in your letter:

- Express deep sorrow at the tragedy of the war between Israel and Hamas that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.
- Thank the Australian Government for its approach to trying to curb the extent of the killing and its support for upholding human rights.
- Urge that the Australian Government do all it can to see an end to the killing and to support the protection of non-combatants on both sides of the war. The Australian Government should seek to align itself with people who are seeking a just and lasting peace.
- Ask that the Australian Government provide assistance to Palestinian and Israeli organisations that seek a just and lasting peace through non-violent means.
- Request that the Australian Government urge the Israeli Government to uphold human rights, including an end to the use of extrajudicial executions, detention without trial or due process and the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Members of the Israeli security forces that commit human rights abuses must be held to account. Point out that given the asymmetry in military power, peace will only be possible when the Israeli Government is committed to seeing it happen. Peace will not be possible if the Israeli Government continues to support the use of human rights abuses against Palestinians.