

Justice and Equality Before Peace:  
A reflection, prayer and actions for  
the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel  
(15th-22nd September)

Mike Mineter

**Reflection:**

*'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace.*

*Jeremiah 6:14 (NIV)*

Early in September I mentioned the WWPPI to a quietly spoken, compassionate, gentle lady with a ready smile. She paused a moment, frowned, stood up, face reddening with anger, and shouted, 'When will your churches do something for justice for the Palestinians, and stop just talking about peace?! To speak of peace without working for justice is to sustain the injustice.' She had unknowingly echoed the theme of talks I have heard from Palestinian Christians. She had also echoed the call from non-violent activists in the West Bank – for the international community to name and challenge injustices. What needs to be named? Why is she right? What can we do?

Our media still often report Israel's state violence as being in response to Palestinian violence. Reports have tended to focus on the (undeniable) fears and suffering experienced by Israelis. The implication is that if only Palestinians were passive, there would be peace, so meanwhile Israel cannot but seek security by force. The reports also have the tone of a symmetrical dispute between neighbouring states, despite Israel being an expansionist state and military superpower heavily supported by the USA, and the Palestinian state being little more than an aspiration.

The fears and suffering of all in the Holy Land *do* need to be recognised and remembered, and yet, when I visited in 2015, 2016 and 2017, I witnessed a reality different from the reports of much mainstream media.

In 2015, a priest whom I had known since I was six years old was leading a pilgrimage, so I joined him. After seeing biblical sites in beautiful verdant

Galilee, we entered the north of the West Bank and were driven south, parallel to the Jordan River. The contrast was stark – this was a harsh landscape of desert hills. Only a strip of land along the Jordan River and a few areas near the road were irrigated enough for agriculture. I later learnt that the Jordan Valley is a ‘military zone’ closed to Palestinians, Israel controls the water, and only settlements get enough for irrigation. We paused where Jesus might have been baptised, and made our way via Jericho easily through a checkpoint to Jerusalem. Next day we returned, stopping in an underground car park in Bethlehem. We were ushered swiftly through Nativity Square to the churches and back to the coach. Being tourists, our passage through a checkpoint to Jerusalem was again easy and we had seen little of current realities.

After that focus on 2000 years ago, to find out more, I returned in November 2016. Touched by a Bible study and Eucharist at the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre – which is about liberating theology from its part in the oppression of Palestinians as well as living a theology that seeks liberation for all – I then participated in Sabeel’s 2017 conference and tour, and also met progressive Israelis who seek justice for Palestinians, and peace for all.

On each visit I learnt more and witnessed the effect of Israeli state policies and actions in annexed East Jerusalem and elsewhere in the West Bank – ‘Judea and Samaria’ to the Israeli government, ‘occupied territory’ in the view of the UN.<sup>1</sup>

In what was described to me as the most tear-gassed place in the world, Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem,<sup>2</sup> I heard about middle-of-the-night detentions of children<sup>3</sup> and the consequences for mental health.

In Jerusalem's Old City, and in Hebron, I walked past Palestinian shops protected by nets from the rubbish thrown and tipped down from the apartments above.

In the South Hebron hills and the Negev area of Israel,<sup>4</sup> I saw demolished Palestinian homes and community buildings,<sup>5</sup> one built with EU funding.<sup>6</sup>

I saw the kibbutzim and new villages built on the sites of former Palestinian villages. During the Nakba ('disaster', 'catastrophe' or 'cataclysm') in 1948 *'more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs ... fled or were expelled from their homes'*<sup>7</sup> – hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages were razed and/or their populations displaced.<sup>8</sup> I saw the village Umm Al-Hiran. This was depopulated last year. In East Jerusalem, I saw the flag of Israel flying from houses from which Palestinians had been evicted. The Nakba continues.<sup>9</sup>

I heard about how in the West Bank there are different laws for Palestinians and Israelis: military law for Palestinians, civilian law for settlers. This a consequence of 'transition' arrangements in the Oslo Accords – ones that have persisted for 50 years.

I heard how Israel controls natural resources.<sup>10</sup>

I saw the separation barrier,<sup>11</sup> a wall that will be more than 400 miles long. Most of it is built, and near Bethlehem it is 8 metres high, constructed mainly through Palestinians' land, including precious olive groves. It is being built by Israel in the name of security notwithstanding its easily walkable gaps even after about 14 years of construction. I saw its real effect. It denies Palestinians access to their land for agriculture, recreation and building. It defines a de facto border, with some settlements on the Israeli side. The Barrier shrink-wraps and isolates Palestinian towns so with the checkpoints and permits the effect is: to obstruct travel<sup>7</sup> to work, families, education and religious sites; to take land from Palestinians; to control, impair and make

Palestinians' lives chaotic; to de-develop their fragile economy and stress Palestinians, intending them to give up and leave.

I heard from Jews and Christians who reject the interpretations of scripture that led to Israel forging its path of exclusive rights by *'the atheist founders of the state who claimed God as their estate agent'*.

I saw symmetry in neither power nor violence – as is further shown in Gaza by the casualties, including of children, journalists and medics, in the ongoing (despite most media ignoring it) 'March of Return'.<sup>12</sup>

Mazin Qumsiyeh, a Palestinian scientist and author and the director of the Palestine Museum of Natural History, recently visited Scotland. He described how Palestinian resistance has largely been non-violent.<sup>13</sup>

As regards my initial question: 'What needs to be named?' Mazin interprets the settlements, the Barrier and the oppressive actions by the Israeli state as symptoms; the diagnosis of the fundamental problem is Israel's settler colonialism – the taking over of land through settlement with the control and expulsion of Palestinians.

In the light of the many Israeli and Jewish groups who challenge the policies of the Israeli state and seek justice for Palestinians, the tensions are most in focus when seen as being between those who support the Israeli state, and those who see the ending of settler colonialism as a first step to peace. For the former, 'peace' comes through force and Palestinians being passively subservient. For the latter peace comes through equality and human rights for all.

I talked to Palestinians who reaffirmed their commitment to non-violent resistance – through *sumoud* ('steadfast perseverance') and just continuing to live there. I heard of how their faith gives hope in hopelessness; of a

desire for life in its fullness for all in the land, settlers included; of the need to act and speak *'only through a filter of love'*.

As I was told by Palestinians: *'The oppression and occupation must cease – it dehumanises both the oppressed and the oppressor. Then there is land enough for us all.'*

Another of our hosts challenged us: *'Now you know, what will you do?'* ...

Prayer is vital of course, and so I pray:

**Prayer:**

*Lord, you responded to the needs of the excluded:  
the lepers, the Samaritan woman,  
the Roman centurion, the Syrophoenician woman.*

*You taught and showed that God's love is for all –  
love unbounded by our narrow theologies and  
politics.*

*Help me to confront false theologies and politics that exclude,  
that promote injustice and build Babel towers of power.*

*May the narratives, policies and actions of Israelis and  
Palestinians become ones that respect and make space for all.*

*May the diversity in religion and culture that flowered in  
Palestine for so many centuries be seen again.*

*Expand my empathy to embrace all people  
and indeed all the earth.*

*In your name, I pray.*

*Amen*

**Actions:**

How can we cooperate with God and help to answer this prayer? Justice is a precursor to peace, but are we willing to act to seek justice? Our churches tend to be good at charity, which is needed for relief and to heal wounds – and that is good of course – but charity alone does not address causes and bring justice.

Although we might not realise it, because the problem seems ‘far away’, we are complicit in the Israeli and Palestinian conflict: in our shopping, in our investment, in our travel, in our opinions, in our silence and inaction ...

*Some things we can do:*

1) We can raise awareness in our churches and beyond so that we all become better informed, and then take the vital step to action for justice and peace.

2) We can boycott Israeli produce, especially from the settlements. See:

*Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS):*

*<https://bdsmovement.net/get-involved/what-to-boycott>*

*Who Profits?:*

*<https://whoprofits.org>*

3) We can support the Palestinian economy, purchasing from fair-trade shops that work in solidarity with grassroots projects and communities. See:

*Hadeel: Fair Trade Palestinian Crafts:*

[www.hadeel.org](http://www.hadeel.org)

4) We can call for moral investment so that we and others do not share in profits from any country that transgresses international law. See:

[www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk/category/taking-action/investing-for-peace](http://www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk/category/taking-action/investing-for-peace)

5) We can support Palestinian and Israeli groups working together for peace through justice.

Among groups working for justice for all are:

in Israel, Rabbis for Human Rights, Zochrot, Breaking the Silence, Yesh Din, Machsom Watch, the Israel Committee Against House Demolitions, B'Tselem, and Ta-ayush;

in the USA, the If Not Now movement, and Jewish Voice for Peace;

and in the UK, Jews for Justice and Scottish Jews against Zionism.

6) Palestinians have asked us to '*Come and see*', so as to '*go and tell*'. We can visit the Holy Land, meet Israelis and Palestinians and learn more. See:

<https://www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk/a-kairos-perspective-of-tourism-and-pilgrimage-come-and-see/>

7) We can challenge the media when news reports are skewed.

8) We can encourage our politicians<sup>14</sup> and church leaders to speak out for justice, remembering how international solidarity helped to pave the road to justice in apartheid South Africa.

*Mike Mineter*

**Notes:**

**(Websites accessed on 24 September 20)**

1. <https://www.ochaopt.org/>
2. [https://www.law.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NoSafeSpace\\_full\\_report22Dec2017.pdf](https://www.law.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NoSafeSpace_full_report22Dec2017.pdf)
3. [https://www.dci-palestine.org/children\\_in\\_israeli\\_detention](https://www.dci-palestine.org/children_in_israeli_detention)
4. <https://www.dukium.org/unrecognized-villages/>
5. <https://icahd.org>
6. [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/palestine-occupied-palestinian-territory-west-bank-and-gaza-strip/59155/six-month-report-demolitions-and-confiscations-eu-funded-structures-west-bank-including-east\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/palestine-occupied-palestinian-territory-west-bank-and-gaza-strip/59155/six-month-report-demolitions-and-confiscations-eu-funded-structures-west-bank-including-east_en)
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948\\_Palestinian\\_exodus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Palestinian_exodus)
8. <https://www.palestineremembered.com/>
9. <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/tamara-nassar/israel-forces-umm-al-hiran-villagers-agree-expulsion>

and

<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/palestinian-family-evicted-silwan-neighbourhood-east-jerusalem>

10. <https://www.foei.org/resources/publications/publications-bysubject/human-rights-defenders-publications/environmental-nakba>

11. <https://www.ochaopt.org/theme/west-bank-barrier>

12. <https://www.ochaopt.org/theme/casualties>

and

[https://www.btselem.org/press\\_releases/20190117\\_2018\\_fatalities](https://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20190117_2018_fatalities)

13. See *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment*, by Mazin Qumsiyeh:

<http://qumsiyeh.org/popularresistanceinpalestine/>

**Some websites:**

Breaking the Silence (Israeli soldiers talk about the Occupied Territories):  
<http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il>

B'Tselem (The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories): <http://www.btselem.org>; also interactive maps at <https://conquer-and-divide.btselem.org>

Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI):  
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/eappi>

International Solidarity Movement: <https://palsolidarity.org/>

Iona Community Israel/Palestine Position Statement:  
<https://iona.org.uk/2017/10/06/iona-community-israel-palestine-position-statement/>

Jonathan Cook: <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/>

Letter from Catholic leaders in the Holy Land, May 2019:  
<https://www.lpj.org/assembly-catholic-ordinaries-invites-people-of-the-holy-land-to-build-bridges-of-respect-and-love/>

Open letter from The National Coalition of Christian Organisations in Palestine 21 June, 2017:  
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/letters-received/open-letter-from-the-national-coalition-of-christian-organizations-in-palestine/>

Sabeel-Kairos: [www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk](http://www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk), the UK support for:  
Sabeel Liberation Theology Centre: <http://sabeel.org/> and  
Kairos Palestine: <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/>

Women in Black: <http://womeninblack.org>

