

ISRAEL/PALESTINE:

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT IN THE HOLY LAND

The Churches' Agency on International Issues:
resourcing New Zealand churches and congregations on global concerns.

BACKGROUNDER 1 • 2003

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The Churches Agency on International Issues (CAII) aims to resource New Zealand churches and congregations on international issues.

We live in an increasingly interconnected world and as part of this global network, churches must decide how to respond to international injustice and oppression. To do so, we need to be well informed and listen to the voices of the people involved.

Starting with Israel/Palestine, CAII will be exploring major international issues to show their historical, political and faith contexts, and to present views often excluded from mainstream media coverage.

The current CAII member churches are: Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and The Salvation Army. The work of the Agency is contracted to Christian World Service.

How much do you know?

Research in the UK (Guardian Education 16/4/02) has shown that many people have little understanding of the Israel/Palestine conflict despite its regular coverage on television news. Having heard of Palestinian refugees in the media, 80% of the sample audience did not know where they had come from or why they were refugees. In spite of regularly seeing images of violence in the Occupied Territories, 71% did not know who was occupying whose land.

The World Association for Christian Communication has been concerned about media coverage of the conflict. Research shows that much reporting is of the Israeli viewpoint, without giving a voice to other perspectives. The language and horrific images that portray Israeli deaths are not applied to Palestinian deaths, making their loss of life appear less shocking (WACC 2002).

This document will help you gain a greater understanding of what is happening and why. It provides information seldom seen in the news media.

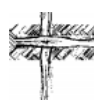
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- Dr Bernard Sabella, DSPR, Middle East Council of Churches, for his comments and support.

Special thanks all the other people and groups in Israel/Palestine who are working towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

 Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand



The Anglican Church in
Aotearoa, New Zealand
and Polynesia

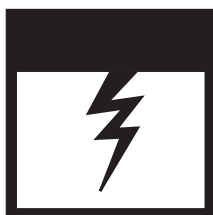


The Salvation Army
in New Zealand, Fiji
and Tonga



The Methodist Church
of New Zealand

A Land of War



The Holy Land has become a land of war. Images of violence, military occupation, terrorism, suffering, fear, and broken peace talks dominate our impressions of the region. Conflict in Israel/Palestine is forever in the media, but how much do we know about what is going on behind the headlines?

Israel/Palestine is one of the most explosive situations confronting global politics and faith communities. It remains at the heart of Middle East conflict, threatening international peace and security and bringing the Arab and Islamic worlds into conflict with the West. Israel/Palestine may seem far from Aotearoa New Zealand but the ongoing conflict touches us all. It incites impassioned responses and entrenched positions threatening peace at all levels.

The conflict has a special poignancy for Christians. The violence is played out against the holy sites of Christianity and draws on biblical history and stories of faith tradition to support conflicting claims to the land. Within the churches, there are diverse viewpoints and much misinformation over this controversial issue. The conflict in the Holy Land can tear New Zealand congregations apart, putting Christians who speak of the injustices done to Palestinians in opposition to Christians who speak of injustices done to Jews and their biblical right to the land. Emotions run high. Yet the people of the region challenge us to acknowledge what is happening and have the courage to speak out. It is an issue we need to understand.

This backgrounder will help New Zealand congregations develop a greater understanding of the conflict's complexities. It examines the background and context, and includes the rarely heard voices from the Israeli peace movement, Palestinian Christians, and the majority of Palestinian Muslims who are not suicide bombers. We are aware that this document will not satisfy all who read it. This is part of the contested nature of the conflict. No discussion of Israel/Palestine will make all sides happy when there are views that reject one or other peoples' right to claim the land. What we hope is that this examination of the conflict's historical background, core issues and faith perspective will contribute to a constructive dialogue of the issue within New Zealand churches. By recognising both sides and listening to the voices calling for peace and reconciliation, we can decide how best to support efforts for peace for the region.

How to Use this Guide:

This backgrounder examines different aspects of the conflict's history, land claims, central issues, and current situation. You can read through all sections to gain an overview of the crisis or go to specific areas for greater clarification. See the accompanying study guide for discussion points, reflection and action. The material is free to use and may be photocopied and distributed with acknowledgement.

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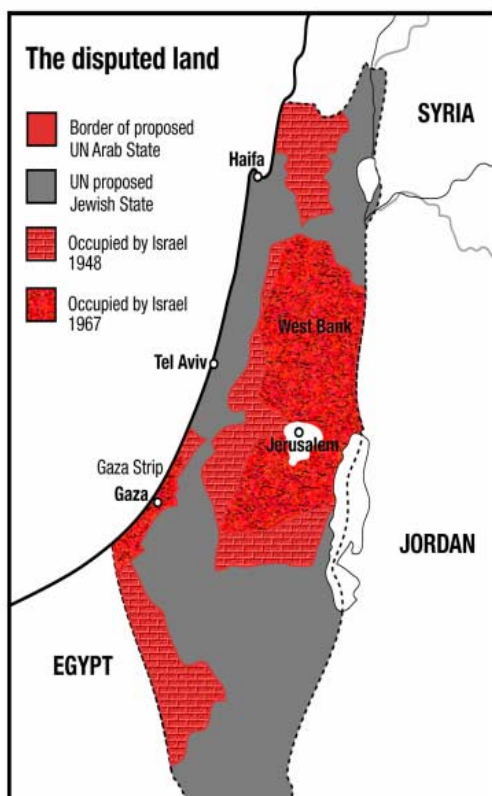
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Section one : What is it all about?



The Israel/Palestine conflict is a complex issue with many different factors and interpretations. At its simplest, the conflict is over

- competing **Jewish and Palestinian claims to the same land**
- the **Israeli occupation** of Palestinian territories
- the harsh, repressive living conditions imposed on Palestinians in occupied areas
- the continuing growth of **Jewish settlements**, illegal under international law, in the **Occupied Territories**
- the need for Israeli security
- the fate of over four million **Palestinian refugees**
- **extremists on both sides who deny the other side's right to existence as a nation and state, and sometimes as a people.**



A home for Jews = homelessness for Palestinians

Current Palestinian violence is in protest of Israeli occupation since 1967, but its roots go back to the creation of Israel in 1948. Dividing the land to create a Jewish state meant the displacement of indigenous Palestinians.

Anti-Semitism in Europe had already led some Jews to settle in Palestine prior to 1948, but the **Holocaust** of World War Two, which killed millions and left thousands of Jews homeless and in fear, made the question of a Jewish state more urgent. Only in a Jewish state could Jews feel safe, and they claimed Palestine for their new country. Jews were only a minority there, however, and the majority population viewed the area as a Palestinian/Arab homeland.

Seeking compromise between competing claims to the same piece of land, the United Nations decided the land should be divided into separate states- a new Jewish state (56.47% of the land) and a Palestinian or Arab state (45.53% of the land) for the indigenous population. The division meant that over half the land of Palestine was given away without the consent of local people. Palestinians lost homes and farms that had been with their families for generations.

An estimated 725,000 to 810,000 Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes during the establishment of the **State of Israel** in 1948 and the **Israel Arab war** that followed it. Israel expanded its territory and instead of 45.53% of the territory, Palestinians were left with only 20% of their original homeland. This remaining land was occupied by Egypt, Syria and Jordan until 1967, when Israel gained the territory in the **Six Day War**. Today over 4 million Palestinian refugees are registered with the UN. Most are living under Israeli military rule in the occupied territories of Gaza and West Bank.

“As a people, we [Jews] have been unable to link the creation of Israel with the displacement of the Palestinians. We have been unwilling to see, let alone remember, that finding our place meant the loss of theirs” Sara Roy 2002

Providing a home, safety and the end of dispersion for one people by creating the dispossession and homelessness of another remains at the heart of the conflict. Until these contradictions are resolved, they will continue to fuel despair, hatred and insecurity for both Palestinians and Israelis. The right of both sides to a safe and secure homeland and independent state needs to be recognised and implemented if a peaceful resolution is to be found.

Section two : Claims to the land



Occupation of the Holy Land:

The areas of present day **Israel and Palestine** have a long history of human settlement. The walled city of Jericho is dated to 7000 BCE and human remains date back 100,000 years. The peoples of the region have lived under the rule of various Empires and witnessed many waves of migration, occupation and conquest.

Biblical Times:

The earliest recorded settlers were the Canaanites (around 2000 BCE). According to biblical history, Abraham and the Hebrews moved to the land of Canaan, which God had promised to Abraham and his descendants, but were later driven from the land by famine. They found refuge in Egypt but after some centuries were reduced to slavery. Moses then led them back to the Promised Land, escaping their persecution. The Canaanites were conquered by Joshua, and under David a stable and successful Jewish kingdom was established. This biblical history has dominated Jewish tradition and remains central to devout Jewish and some Christian understandings of Israel's history. After David, the kingdom declined and split into Israel in the north and Judea in the south. The Assyrians conquered Israel in 721 BCE, ending Jewish settlement. The Babylonians defeated the southern Jewish kingdom of Judea in 586 BCE, exiling the nation's leaders. The **Jewish Diaspora**, which has been central to Jewish history and identity for centuries, had begun.

Ancient Empires:

In 530 BCE the Persian Empire gained control of the land from the Babylonians. Alexander the Great conquered it for the Greeks in 332 BCE. A Jewish revolt in Judea (165 BCE) resulted in a short-lived autonomous state, the last independent Jewish state of ancient times. In 63 BCE Roman troops invaded and named the land *Palaestina*. Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed in 70 CE during a failed Jewish uprising and after another uprising in 135 CE, Jews were expelled from the Jerusalem area. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire during the Fourth Century CE and most local people converted. As Jewish numbers gradually declined, Jews lost their strength and influence in the region. A small community remained in Galilee, but Jewish occupation of Palestine had ended and Jews had become 'a people without a land', finding refuge in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

Islamic Rule:

Palestine continued under Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, rule until about 638, when it was conquered by Arab Muslims. Apart from a brief period of rule by Christian Crusaders (1099-1187), Palestine remained under Muslim rule until World War One and Jerusalem became the third holiest city in Islam. In 1516, Palestine became part of the Ottoman Empire. There were brief occupations by the French (1799-1801) and Egyptians (1831-1840) but Palestine remained under Turkish rule until the break up of the Ottoman Empire at the end of First World War. During the 1300 years of Muslim rule, the people of Palestine became predominantly Muslim and Arab speaking.

The 20th Century:

After World War One, Palestine was ruled under a British mandate until its withdrawal in 1948 when Israel declared statehood over part of the territory. During 1915-16, Britain had promised support for Arab independence in the region and in 1917 made a declaration in support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. These promises fuelled the claims of both Jews and Palestinians to the land.

Today's Palestinians, the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine at the time of partition, are the original people of the land and the descendants of all these waves of conquerors. Jewish migrants began to settle in, or 'return' to Palestine from the 1880s.

Section two : Claims to the land

The Israeli Claim

• Historical connection to the land

Jews argue a three thousand-year historical connection to the land. It was the home of their ancestors and although most lived in exile, there was always a small Jewish presence. Those outside the land maintained their hope and desire to return and the Jewish people had no other permanent home.

• Biblical Promise

Religious Jews argue a right to the land as the descendants of Abraham and Sarah to whom God promised Palestine. Although other people have taken the land from them, it belongs to Jews by divine right. Many Jews believe it is against God's command to give up any of the land they have regained.

• The need for a safe refuge

Jews argue they need the land to be safe. Throughout history, Jews were subject to discrimination, forced expulsion, and violent persecution in Christian Europe culminating in the horrors of the Holocaust. Jews did not feel safe anywhere.

• Success with the land

Some Jews claim that historically Palestine has only been prosperous under the Jews. They point to the achievements of the Israeli state in creating a prosperous, democratic, multi-cultural society, integrating diverse cultures into a vibrant nation and developing a barren land.

• British Promise

The Balfour Declaration of 1917 stated British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, on the condition that the rights of the existing inhabitants be respected, something which was impossible. In many ways the current problem is traceable to the contradictions in the Balfour declaration.

• The empty land myth

Many Jews claim that the land of Palestine was empty; there was plenty of room for Jewish settlement. It was a land without a people for the people without a land.

The Palestinian Claim

• Historical connection to the land

Palestinians argue an historical connection to the land as their ancestors have lived there for thousands of years. Palestinian Christians trace their ancestors to the time of Christ.

• Continuous occupation of the land

Palestinians argue they have a natural right to the land. They have always been the occupiers of the land. They reject Jewish arguments that Palestine was empty. In fact, by calculations of the population at the end of the nineteenth century, Palestine was more populated than Canterbury, New Zealand, is today. Palestinians argue that for most of history, there was no significant Jewish presence and that Jews were never the majority even when they ruled.

• Native people

Palestinians view themselves as native to the land as the first people to live there and the descendants of the waves of Empires and peoples who have occupied Palestine.

• British Promise

During 1915 - 1916 Britain gave a promise of post war independence for Arabs in the Middle East region, supporting Arab desires for an Arab kingdom.

• Religious position

Muslims generally believe that the Jews lost their religious claim when they rejected Jesus and later Mohammed. Many also claim the Islamic conquest of Palestine was in the name of God and the land was made over as a religious trust to Muslims in perpetuity, so that it would be against God to give it up.

• Forced Jewish Settlement

Jewish migration from the 1880s was forced upon the local people, argue Palestinians. Palestinians never wanted Jewish settlement and their land was taken, against their will, to make way for new settlers.

United Nations

Accepting both claims, the United Nations sought to reach a compromise by dividing or partitioning the land. The UN Security Council has reaffirmed partition and recognises the right of two states to exist, Israel and Palestine, side by side within secure and recognised borders (Resolution 1397 (2002) 12/3/02). UN resolutions refer to Israel as the “occupying power” of the Palestinian territories.

 www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpalnew/resolutions_new_qpai

New Zealand’s position

The New Zealand Government

- upholds Israel’s right to exist within secure and recognised borders and the Palestinians corresponding right to self-determination and a viable, independent state
- does not recognise Israel’s annexation of Jerusalem or Jerusalem as the capital of Israel
- regards Gaza and the West Bank as occupied territory
- considers Jewish settlements in occupied territories as an obstacle to peace and does not believe they are legal under international law
- will consider recognising a future Palestinian state when the Palestinian leadership has formally declared statehood
- views the Palestinian Authority as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and Palestinian Representatives have the same diplomatic access to New Zealand Ministers and officials as other states
- On May 1 2003 New Zealand welcomed the latest peace process, the [Roadmap](#), as a realistic and verifiable approach to achieving a two-state solution by 2005. (MFAT 08/2003)

 www.mft.govt.nz/foreign/regions/mideast/faq/aicfaupdate03

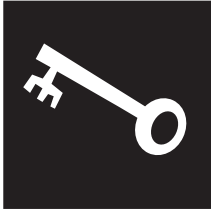
Who is Right?

The claims of both sides are compelling and valid. This is what makes the conflict appear irresolvable. While the fairness of Jewish settlement from the 1880s and the 1948 partition can be disputed, the reality is that the State of Israel now exists. For the international community and many Israelis and Palestinians, the best solution would be to share the land as two states. The challenge is to make the compromise work especially when **extremists** on both sides of the conflict continue to believe the whole territory should be exclusively theirs and do not want to compromise.

“New Zealand is appalled at the ongoing violence and death toll arising from conflict in Israel and the occupied territories. It is clear that innocent people are suffering on both sides. We urge both parties to refrain from violence and to fully observe international human rights standards. New Zealand views the ongoing construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories as a particularly inflammatory obstacle to reconciliation. For its part, the Palestinian Authority must do all it can to demonstrate its rejection of the use of violence to pursue political goals. Both parties need to be active in identifying those responsible for human rights violations and bring them to justice”

Don McKay, New Zealand’s statement to the 57th session of the UN General Assembly Third Committee 30/9-22/11/02).

Section three : Key words and issues to understanding the Israel/Palestine conflict



This section explains some of the key concepts and issues that underlie the conflict over Palestine.

Palestine:

The disputed territory of Palestine has had a long history of settlement (see section 2). Its borders and meaning have changed throughout history. In the context of the current conflict, Palestine is the pre 1948 name given to the area of the Middle East between the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. A territory of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century, it came under British rule at the end of World War One. Today, this area is divided into Israel; Jerusalem and its surroundings; and the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It is bordered by Syria and Lebanon to the north, Egypt to the south, and Jordan to the east.

Palestinians:

The name given to the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine at the time of the 1948 partition and their descendants. While the majority are Muslims, there is a significant Christian minority. Palestinians are connected by their bond to the land of Palestine (their homeland) and their common ancestry from the original people of the land.

Jews:

Until the nineteenth century, Jew was both a religious and ethnic term. It has now become separated into two meanings, people of the Jewish faith, and people of Jewish ethnicity. For religious Jews, the Hebrew Bible is God's word. For secular Jews, it is a history book. Secular Jews have been crucial to the establishment of modern Israel.

Claims to the Land:

The conflict is based on competing claims to the land (see section 2) of Palestine.

- Jews claim Israel as their ancient homeland, promised to them by God. Most lived in exile, but always longed to return to the land. In the late nineteenth century, a movement for a Jewish homeland (Zionism) was founded to reclaim the land and establish a Jewish state where Jews would be free from persecution.
- Palestinians lived on the land for thousands of years and claim it was always their homeland. At the time of partition, communities and families could trace their ancestry and occupation of village land back centuries.

Partition:

In 1947 the [United Nations](#) sought a compromise to the question of who owned Palestine - partitioning the land into two states, one Jewish and one Palestinian (then called Arab). No names were given to the proposed states. The Jewish state was given 56.47% of the land and the Arab state 45.53% (Resolution 181 (II) of 1947). Israel is the Jewish state envisioned in the partition resolution. An Arab state was never declared because the Palestinians considered the partition plan unjust for taking so much of their land and being imposed on them against their will. After war in 1948, Israel expanded beyond its original UN fixed borders into land that had been classified as Palestinian, to occupy 77% of pre 1948 Palestine. After war in 1967, Israel occupied it all.

State of Israel:

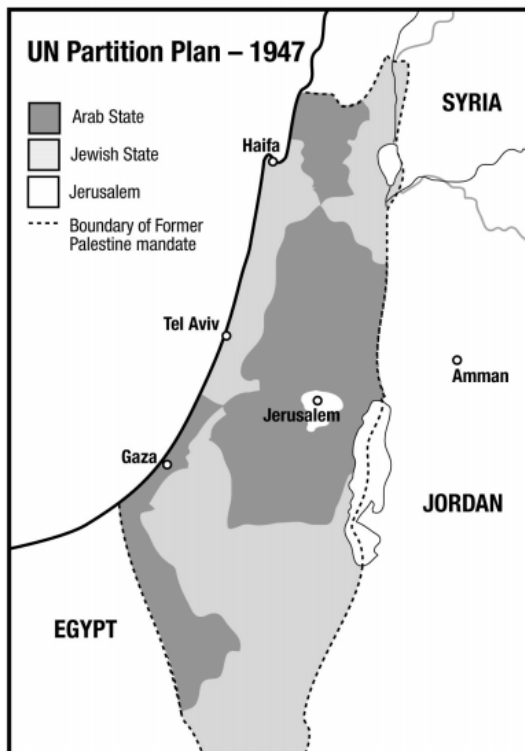
The State of Israel was created on May 14, 1948 as a Jewish state. It is located in part of the territory that formerly made up Palestine.

Israelis:

Citizens of Israel. The majority are Jews, but there are Muslim and Christian minorities. The Palestinians who remained in the new state became citizens, but most claim that they receive second-class treatment.

Extremist Views:

People on both sides of the conflict believe they cannot concede any of the land they claim. To extremist religious Jews, giving up any land is going against the will of God. To extremist secular Jews, to give up any land would leave Israel with indefensible borders. For religious Muslim extremists, to concede the land is to go against the will of God. For other Palestinian extremists, it goes against their national identity based on the bond with their homeland.



Proposed State of Palestine

The following information relates to the Palestinian territories of West Bank and Gaza Strip that will make up an independent State of Palestine.

Area: 6,220 sq km (West Bank: 5,860 sq km, Gaza 360 sq km)

Population (2002 est.): approx 3.4 million (West Bank: 2.2 million Gaza: 1.2 million) + estimated 365,000 Israeli settlers (2001)

Ethnic Groups (2002 est.): West Bank: Palestinian Arab and other 83%, Jewish 17%

Gaza: Palestinian Arab and other 99.4%, Jewish 0.6%

Religion (2002 est.): Predominantly Muslim: West Bank: Muslim 75%, Jewish 17%, Christian and other 8%

Gaza: Muslim 98.7%, Christian 0.7%, Jewish 0.6%

Intended Capital: Jerusalem; the Palestine National Authority (PNA) is based in Jericho

Official Language: Arabic

Government: The Palestinian National Authority: President and legislative council, directly elected by universal suffrage, has limited territorial jurisdiction in parts of the West Bank and Gaza under the 1995 Interim Agreement. It has no criminal jurisdiction over Israelis.

State of Israel

Area: 20,770 sq km (approximately the size of Canterbury, New Zealand), excluding the Occupied Territories

Population (2001): approx 6.5 million

Ethnic Groups (1996 est.): Jewish 80.1% (Europe/America-born 32.1%, Israel-born 20.8%, Africa-born 14.6%, Asia-born 12.6%), non-Jewish 19.9% (mostly Arab)

Religion (2001): Jewish 77%, Muslim 15.5%, Christian 2%, Druze 1.5%, unclassified 4%

Official Languages: Hebrew and Arabic

Capital: Claims Jerusalem as its capital but this is not internationally recognised. Most countries maintain their embassies and diplomatic missions in Tel Aviv.

Government: Parliamentary democracy; no formal constitution; Prime Minister is head of government

Section three : Key words and issues to understanding the Israel/Palestine conflict

The Occupied Palestinian Territories:

The Occupied Palestinian Territories refers to the areas of pre 1948 Palestine that the UN Partition plan had assigned for a Palestinian State - the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. Egypt, Syria and Jordan occupied these areas after the 1948 war until Israel gained control in the 1967 war. They remain under Israeli military control. Israel views its occupation as having “regained control over the West Bank and Gaza” and still makes historic and legal claims to these Palestinian areas, considering them to be disputed territories. The UN calls them occupied territories with Israel as the occupying power (see UN resolutions).

 www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpalnew/resolutions_new_qpal

Living conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are harsh (see section 6).

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA):

The interim government of the Palestinian Territories. The PNA has established numerous government institutions, including Legislative Council, Ministries, and Presidential elections, and is working towards developing the infrastructure for a viable independent state. Its ability to function has been severely restricted by Israeli reoccupation of Palestinian cities and siege and destruction of government buildings and fledging state infrastructure.

Jordan:

Some pro-Israel voices argue that a Palestinian state already exists in the form of Jordan. They believe this is justified since the original League of Nations mandate included what is now Jordan, but the British separated it from Palestine and allowed Jewish settlement only in Palestine. However, Jordan does not consider itself to be a Palestinian homeland or state and has limited the number of Palestinians living in the country.

State of Palestine:

On November 15, 1988, the Palestine National Council proclaimed an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories, with Jerusalem as its capital. It was recognised by 54 countries, although it has not yet been established as Israel still occupies and controls the land it claims. A future state of Palestine is one of the issues that need to be resolved in peace negotiations. The UN recognises Palestinian rights to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty.

The Palestinians want the borders of a state of Palestine and the state of Israel to comply with the 1967 Armistice Line with a permanent territorial corridor linking the West Bank and Gaza Strip sections of the state of Palestine. East Jerusalem would become the capital of The Palestinian State and West Jerusalem the capital of Israel.

The 1993 Declaration of Principles granted limited autonomy to Palestinians in the Gaza strip and the city of Jericho in the West Bank. This autonomy was to be extended but continuing violence on both sides has disrupted the process.

Jerusalem:

The status of Jerusalem is one of the most contentious issues in the conflict. It is a holy city to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Holy sites include the Western (Wailing) Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre the Passion of Crucifixion, and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Both Jews and Palestinians claim Jerusalem. Under the UN Partition plan, Jerusalem was to remain under international administration. But this did not happen. After the 1948 war, Israel and Jordan divided the City into an eastern sector, including the Old City, controlled by Jordan, and a western sector, or the new City controlled by Israel. After the 1967 war, Israel occupied East Jerusalem, annexing it in 1980. Israel claims the whole and united Jerusalem as its capital and wants the city to forever remain under Israel's sovereignty. The international community has not recognised the Israeli claim. Most states maintain their diplomatic missions in Tel Aviv. The Palestinians have claimed East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent Palestinian state.

To Israel, the city is central to Zionism and Jewish identity, and they want to maintain access to sites they consider sacred. Israel is not willing to negotiate on this point. Palestinians also feel unable to compromise on Jerusalem. They have an historical territorial claim to the city and they, and the Islamic world, want control of Islamic holy sites. The future of Jerusalem is a major obstacle to the peace process and the UN is determined that Israeli efforts to change the physical and demographic characteristics of the city should not affect the outcome of negotiations about its future.

Creating facts on the ground:

This phrase is used to describe Israeli actions in seizing Palestinian land and settling Palestinian areas with Israeli citizens, changing the demographic and physical nature of the area to make a stronger claim to them in future negotiations.

Zionism:

The movement/philosophy that Jews should have their own state in their ancestral homeland (viewed as Israel). There is a wide variety of Zionist thought, including socialist, right wing, secular, ultra-religious, peace activists, and [Christian](#). Some Zionists continue to claim Palestinian areas and parts of Jordan as the land of Greater Israel and want to occupy it.

Jewish/ anti-Semitic persecution:

Jewish people have endured a horrific history of discrimination and persecution based on their “Jewishness”. This has included community-wide expulsion from European countries, restricted rights to livelihood, restricted to specified neighbourhoods, physical attacks, murder and the Holocaust. Persecution has been a motivating force for the establishment of a safe and secure Jewish homeland.

The Holocaust:

The Holocaust of World War Two was a driving force in establishing a Jewish state. It showed Jews everywhere that they could trust no one and be safe nowhere. For many Jews it is not an event that belongs merely to the past as they continue to live with the memory and feeling of suffering, persecution and palpable fear.

Zionists argue the Holocaust would not have happened if European Jews had had a Jewish state that they could have escaped to. Israel has been a safe haven for persecuted Russian and Ethiopian Jews.

Palestinians argue that by taking their land to create a Jewish state, Palestinians are paying the price of European anti-Semitism. The horrific violence and inhumanity of the Holocaust was not committed by Arabs but by Europeans. Palestinians feel they are suffering because of what Europeans did to each other and the failure of the US and other countries to provide Jews with a refuge prior to World War Two.

In Israel there is a new initiative for Arabs and Jews to study the Holocaust. Mizikhron Leshalom (“From Memory to Peace”) wants 300 people to undertake the training and start a process of changing attitudes of Israelis and Palestinians. Concerned about the deterioration in relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel, the founders believe “The two peoples will not be able to abandon the path of bloodshed until each understands and internalises the other’s pain and the other’s fears, which pushed them to the line of fire, conflict and war ... We wish to study and to get to know the suffering, the hardships, the torture and the destruction ... to fully identify with and express solidarity with the Jews.”

The Holocaust raises challenges for the Palestinian population. They do not question the horrors committed against the Jewish people during the Holocaust but some feel the memory of the Holocaust is exploited in order to persecute Palestinians and to imprison an entire nation with closures and curfews. It can be a case of the two peoples competing for victim status.

In the collective Israeli consciousness, the Arab attitude toward the Holocaust is embodied by the Mufti of Jerusalem, who maintained ties with Adolph Hitler during the war. The reality is more complicated, of course. Contrasting forces were at work in the Arab world including those who held a positive view of the Nazis’ rise to power and those who doggedly opposed it, led by the members of the Communist movements.

PARTNERS IN PAIN; ARABS STUDY THE HOLOCAUST, Aviv Lavie, Counterpunch, February 13, 2003

Jewish Diaspora:

The dispersion of the Jewish people around the world, living in exile from Israel. Throughout the Diaspora, Jews looked forward to returning to Israel. Today, the majority of the world’s Jews have chosen to remain in their country of birth rather than “return” to Israel, although many provide crucial support to Israel’s politics, economy and development. The mental and spiritual forced exile has ended.

Section three : Key words and issues to understanding the Israel/Palestine conflict

Palestinian Diaspora/Displacement:

While the creation of Israel signalled an end to the Jewish Diaspora, it was the cause of the Palestinian Diaspora, a loss that is rarely acknowledged. More than half of Palestine's inhabitants abandoned or were forced from their homes. Most Palestinians now live as refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Jordan. There are large Palestinian communities in other Middle Eastern countries, Europe, Chile, Brazil and the USA.

Palestinian Refugees:

The UN's special agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, defines Palestinian refugees as "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict". Their definition also covers their descendants. In 1950 there were 914,000 registered Palestine refugees. In 2002 the number was over 4 million and continues to rise. Most Palestinian refugees live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories or Arab states. For more information see

 www.un.org/unrwa

Right of Return:

Palestinians are calling for a right of return for Palestinian refugees to their homes in Israel. On 11 December 1948, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 194(III) recognising the right of Palestinians to return. For Palestinians, the right to live in their homeland is a matter of principle and the core of their national identity.

Israel rejects a right of return for Palestinians. The return of Palestinians would create a demographic problem for Israel, and it would not be possible to continue as a Jewish state. Israel has its own "right of return" for all Jews. Every Jew in the world has the right to settle in Israel, viewed as a return to the ancestral homeland. The vast majority of Jews remain in the country of their birth.

Zionists argue that they have settled many Jewish refugees from other lands, including Arab lands, so in return Arabs should resettle Palestinians in their lands. Although there are similarities of culture and religion, this argument has always denied Palestinians their own place in the world and their own homeland.

The Right to Palestinian Return is one of the key challenges to peace negotiations.

Arab opposition:

Arab States initially denied Israel's right to exist and sought to destroy the new state in the 1948-49 Israel-Arab war. Wars between Israel and Arab states occurred again in 1956, 1967, and 1973. With hostile neighbouring states, Israel claimed the need for expanded territory in order to possess defensible borders. This meant occupying Palestinian land, which provoked more hostility from Arab states. Some Arab states have now recognised Israel and some leaders have entered into peace treaties. The Palestinian National Authority has also recognised the State of Israel and its right to exist. The fact that Palestinian school texts have now removed anti-Semitism present in older books and do not seek to erase Israel, delegitimise it or replace it with the "State of Palestine" is viewed as a tremendous improvement in recognising Israel's right to exist (UNRWA).

Jewish Settlements/Settlers:

Since the 1967 war, Israel has been supporting Jewish settlement in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This is illegal under international law and is inflaming the situation with the Palestinians by "creating the facts on the ground" (manufacturing a strong Jewish presence and cutting Palestinian communities off from each other), destroying Palestinian livelihoods, and justifying a large Israeli military presence. The future of the settlements is a major stumbling block to peace (see Section 6 and Section 7).

Intifada:

Commonly translated as "uprising", this is the name given to two periods of Palestinian violence or resistance to Israeli occupation, 1987-93 and 2000-to the present.

The United Nations (UN):

The UN has played an important role in the Israel/Palestine conflict. It was through the UN partition plan that Israel was created. There is a special section devoted to the Israel/Palestine conflict (Division for Palestinian Rights) and there have been many resolutions about the conflict. For more information see:

 www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/index.html

The UN also has a special agency for Palestinian refugees. See:

 www.un.org/unrwa

Section four : Contesting the Holy Land: the political history behind today's conflict



Israel/Palestine has a long history of human settlement and many empires have ruled over the region and its people (see [section 2](#)). The beginnings of the current conflict are to be found in late nineteenth century when Zionism was born in response to centuries of Jewish persecution in Christian Europe. The Zionist movement demanded a Jewish homeland where Jews would have peace and security, and supported Jewish immigration to Palestine as the land promised to Jews in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Increasing numbers of Jewish settlers moved to Palestine to escape anti-Jewish violence and persecution in Eastern Europe. This forced Arab peasants off their land, creating homelessness and the beginnings of Palestinian/Jewish tensions. During the 1930s Europe and the US were reluctant to accept Jewish migrants and refugees seeking a safe refuge from Nazi persecution and Jewish immigration to Palestine escalated.

Both Jews and Palestinians believed Palestine was their homeland, although it was under Ottoman (Turkish) rule. During World War One, Britain gained control of Palestine and made promises to both sides – supporting the claim for a Jewish homeland and post-war Arab independence. This inspired both sides to fight for their claim to the land. In 1947, unable to resolve the competing claims, Britain handed the problem to the newly formed United Nations.

The United Nations divided the land. This compromise was known as the partition plan (see [section 1](#) and below). Palestinians and Arab states argued the decision as unjust. It forced Palestinians to give up over half their existing homeland. A Jewish state, Israel, was declared on May 14 1948, provoking Arab opposition and violence.

A series of wars between Israel and the Arab states, terrorist acts by Palestinians fighting for their homeland, Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories, broken peace talks, Palestinian uprisings and Israeli crackdowns have since dominated the history of the disputed land.

A Time Line of Key Events

1880s: Arab land speculators sell Palestinian land to wealthy European Jews buying for Jewish settlers. Between 1891 and 1920 8,000 Arabs in 22 villages are forced off the land. Arab peasants protest.

1897: First Zionist Congress, Basel Switzerland, declares aim to set up a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

1916: British Commissioner in Egypt gives a promise of post war Arab independence in return for Arab leaders' support against the Ottoman Empire. Whether Palestine was included in the agreement has since been a matter of debate.

1916: Britain and France make the secret Sykes Picot Agreement to divide the region between them after the war.

1917: The Balfour Declaration. In a crucial event in modern Middle Eastern history, a November 2 letter from Foreign Secretary Arthur J Balfour to Lord Rothschild stated that the British government favoured the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people

in Palestine. In the context of the times, Britain was not necessarily promising a nation-state but possibly a home under British protection. Arabs did not believe Britain had the right to promise their land to anyone. In 1922 the Churchill White Paper sought to clarify the Balfour Declaration. Jews had the right to a national homeland but not the whole of Palestine. Non-Jewish interests had to be safeguarded and Jewish immigration had to be based on the economic capacity for the country to absorb them.

1922-47: British Mandate of Palestine. Arab demands for national government rejected as Britain seeks to balance Arab interests with development of a Jewish homeland. Britain separates Palestine from TransJordan and allows Zionist settlement only in the former. Zionist hardliners claim that this was the partition of the land into Jewish and Palestinian states.

Section four : Contesting the Holy Land: the political history behind today's conflict

A Time Line of Key Events contnued...

- 1920s-30s: Violence and anti-Jewish rioting. Major clashes occur in 1920, 1929 and 1936-39. British fact-finding commissions say unrest is caused by increased Jewish immigration (fuelled by Nazi persecution) and land ownership, increasing landlessness of Arab peasants, and Jewish only labour policies in Jewish settlements. In 1920 there were 9 Arabs for every Jew. In 1948, the ratio was 2:1.
- 1930s-40s: British proposals for settlement rejected by both sides. Violence and terrorism used by Arabs and Jews to advance their competing claims.
- 1947: Britain, unable to find a solution acceptable to both sides hands the problem over to the United Nations. Displacement of Jews at the end of World War Two's Holocaust made the issue of establishing a safe Jewish homeland critical.
- 1947: The United Nations proposes a partition of Palestine into two independent states - one Jewish (56.47% of the land), one Palestinian Arab (45.53% of the land), with Jerusalem internationalised (Resolution 181 (II) of 1947). On 29 November 33 countries voted in favour, 13 against and 10 abstained. Arabs and Palestinians rejected the plan as unjust because it called for Palestinians to lose over half of their homeland. The dispute broke into full-scale war and Britain announced it would end its mandate on 15 May 1948.
- 1948: Jewish forces start forcing the population out of Arab villages to make room for newly arriving Jewish immigrants. In April, Jewish forces massacre the Arab population of Deir Yassin. Palestinians flee in terror from their land.
- Israel declares independence on 14 May 1948. Arab states do not recognise the State of Israel. A Palestinian State is not proclaimed. On 15 May Arab states declare war on Israel, and Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Arab Liberation Forces invade. The Arab armies are ill prepared and Israel expands its territory to occupy 77% of the original Palestinian homeland. Jordan annexes the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip is occupied by Egypt.
- 1949: A ceasefire is reached but Israel refuses to give up Arab land or allow Palestinian refugees to return home. By the end of 1949, only 160,000 Arabs remain in Israel.
- 1950-1995: An estimated 2.5 million Jews migrate to Israel under the Law of Return allowing Jews automatic right of citizenship in Israel.
- 1950s: Continuing border clashes between Israel and Arab neighbours.
- 1956: Suez crisis. Egyptian leader Nasser nationalises the Suez canal. England and France fear the canal will be closed to shipping and secretly prepare military action with Israel. On October 29, 1956, Israel invades Egypt and occupies the Sinai Peninsula. England and France intervene to force a ceasefire, requiring both Egypt and Israel to withdraw from the canal (ensuring their own access). The US and Soviet Union force Britain and France to withdraw in December. Israeli forces withdraw in March 1957.
- 1964: Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) is established with the aim of overthrowing Israel. Carries out terrorist acts, guerilla raids and border incursions throughout the 1960s/70s
- 1967: Six-Day War: Israel attacks Arab States on June 5. By June 10 Israel captured the remaining Palestinian territories of east Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip plus the Sinai Peninsula. The war brought about a second exodus of Palestinians. Another half a million people were made homeless. The UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November called on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. Arab States will not recognise Israel and engage in peace talks while Arab land is occupied.
- Jewish settlements are first set up in the Occupied Territories of Golan Heights, Gaza Strip and West Bank. The main push for settlements comes in the 1970s.
- 1973: Yom Kippur War: Egypt and Syria attack Israel to regain land. Losses are high on both sides and Israel regains land, expanding territory beyond the 1967 ceasefire lines.
- 1974: The United Nations General Assembly reaffirms the inalienable rights of Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, and return.

- 1975: The General Assembly give PLO observer status in the Assembly and other international conferences held under UN auspices.
- 1977: Egypt's President Sadat is the first Arab leader to recognise Israel.
- 1978: Camp David talks result in 1979 Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel.
- 1982: Israel invades Lebanon with the declared intention of wiping out PLO guerilla bases. They surround west Beirut and negotiate the removal of several thousand PLO and Syrian troops from Lebanon. Palestinian refugee camps are unprotected and a large-scale massacre of children, women and the elderly takes place at the Sabra and Shatila camps by Israeli allies (the Phalangists). Israeli forces do nothing, shocking the Israeli population. 400,000 Israelis go on anti-war demonstrations. Ariel Sharon (current PM) is made to resign as Defence Minister after an Israeli inquiry concluded he failed to act to prevent the killings.
- 1987-1993: Intifada: An Arab uprising against Israeli occupation takes place in Gaza and the West Bank. Palestinians engage in civil disobedience, general strikes, boycotts of Israeli goods, graffiti, barricades, and stone throwing demonstrations. The Intifada sees the emergence of two "Islamist" groups, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which base the ideology more on religion than does the PLO and which have generally been more hard-line. The nature of the Israeli Defence Force response, according to the UN, results in mass injuries and heavy loss of life among Palestinian civilians. More than 1,200 Palestinians are killed.
- 1988: The Palestinian National Council (a government in exile) votes to accept the two state solution, based on the 1947 UN partition resolution, renounce terrorism and seek a negotiated settlement.
- 1991-93: Series of Palestinian-Israeli peace talks in Madrid and Washington. After 1992 election of left wing government in Israel under Yitzhak Rabin, secret talks between Israel and the PLO are held in Oslo. Israel and PLO formally recognise each other, providing a way to move forward.
- 1993: Oslo Accords or Declaration of Principles (DOP) signed in Washington on 13 September. The DOP provides for limited self-rule in Gaza and the West Bank and Israel's military withdrawal. It is an interim agreement pending a final peace agreement. A deal expanding self-rule in the West Bank is signed in September 1995.
- 1995: On November 4, a religious Jew opposed to Israel's peace policies assassinates Prime Minister Rabin.
- 1996: Palestinian elections are held in January. Arafat is elected President.
- Increasing violence from extremists on both sides threatens the peace process. Opposition to peace policies grows as Israeli civilians are targeted in attacks. No party wins an outright majority in Israeli elections but the right-wing, 'hawkish' Benjamin Netanyahu wins direct election for the Prime Minister. His pre-election promises of honouring peace agreements with the PLO do not materialise.
- 1997: A decision to build a new Jewish settlement on a hilltop in east Jerusalem provokes further Palestinian unrest.
- 1999: Former army chief Ehud Barak, the Labour Party leader, defeats Netanyahu in a national election. Four months later Israel and the PLO sign an interim peace accord agreeing to conclude final status talks by September 2000.
- 2000: Camp David talks in July between Arafat and Barak end in disagreement. Palestinians agree to delay declaration of statehood for at least two months to allow more time for further talks. Talks reach an impasse.
- Right-wing Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon visits a Jerusalem site holy to both Jews and Muslims, in defiance of Palestinian control of the site. This sparks clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli security forces. The second Intifada begins on September 29.
- 2001: Sharon wins Israeli elections as electorate turns away from the land for peace deal.

Section four : Contesting the Holy Land: the political history behind today's conflict

A Time Line of Key Events continued...

- 2002: Arab leaders agree in principle to the existence of an Israeli state. Saudi Arabia presents a peace plan proposing “normal ties” with Israel in return for an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab land and creation of a Palestinian state.
- March 12 UN Security Council endorses concept of a Palestinian state and UN Secretary General calls Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories illegal.
- March 29 A Palestinian “suicide bombing” kills 22 people during a religious Passover feast. Israel retaliates by sending troops and tanks into the city of Ramallah to besiege Arafat's headquarters. This kind of violence and violent response has become extremely common in recent years and threatens all efforts for a peaceful solution.
- In June, Israel decides to erect a 360 km wall along the entire West Bank to separate it from Israel and prevent the uncontrolled entry of Palestinians into Israel. In places the wall is being built on Palestinian land.
- December 2 Prime Minister Sharon dismisses statement by Israel's Ambassador to the UN accepting Palestinians should have their own state. Sharon does not reject a two-state solution but nor does he accept it as inevitable.
- 2003: Sharon re-elected as Prime Minister. Sharon
January 28 campaigned as the best person to lead Israel through the troubled times but offered no new strategies for resolving the conflict. Palestinian officials see Sharon's election as a blow to peace.
- Israeli human rights groups calculate the West Bank Wall will adversely affect 210,000 people as it turns Palestinian villages into enclaves, cutting off access to water supplies and agricultural lands, and further impedes Palestinians movement to their jobs, hospitals and other services.
- 30 April The Road Map to peace is released to Israel and Palestinian leaders. It was developed by the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations as a goal-driven, phase-by-phase route to ending the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians within two years.

The Road Map

The plan has three phases. Phase 1: Ending terror and violence, normalising Palestinian life, Israeli withdrawal and freeze on settlement expansion and Palestinian elections. This was supposed to be achieved by mid 2003. Phase 2: the creation of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and attributes of sovereignty, based on the new constitution (mid 2003-December 2003) and Phase 3: permanent status agreement and end of conflict, agreement on final borders, Jerusalem, refugees and settlements, and Arab states to agree to peace deals with Israel.

The two main Palestinian militant Islamic groups – Hamas and Islamic Jihad – announced a three-month ceasefire. The mainstream nationalist Fatah movement – led by Yasser Arafat and Abu Mazen – followed suit, although without the co-operation of armed splinter groups like the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. Suicide attacks have continued.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has publicly accepted the idea of a Palestinian state. He has started withdrawing Israeli forces from Palestinian areas and releasing Palestinian prisoners. Yet assassinations, settlements and house demolitions have continued. On August 5, the withdrawal was halted and Sharon has refused to stop work on the West Bank Wall.

Violence has continued by both sides threatening implementation of the peace plan.

See

[www www.guardian.co.uk/israel](http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel)

[www http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/middle_east/2001/israel_and_the_palestinians/](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/middle_east/2001/israel_and_the_palestinians/)

for up to date time lines of events in Israel/Palestine.



The West Bank Wall. In most places the separation barrier consists or will consist of an electrified fence. In some places however it takes the form of an eight metre high concrete wall. When finished, the wall will all but surround Qalqiliya. A tiny bottleneck on the eastern side of the city guarded by an Israeli checkpoint will be the only entrance/exit. WCC-EAPPI/Marja

Section five : The current crisis



Since September 2000, violence has dominated the Israel/Palestine conflict. Both parties have moved away from negotiations into tit-for-tat violence and retaliations that have left hundreds of Palestinians and Israelis killed or wounded.

The promising peace process of the 1990s left many of the difficult issues unanswered, hampering any real progress. Would Israel remove **Jewish settlements** from Palestinian territories; what would be the status of **Jerusalem**; would **Palestinian refugees** displaced in 1948 and 1967 be allowed to return to their homes in Israel; and would Israel allow the establishment of a **Palestinian state**? Israeli withdrawals and dismantling of settlements did not proceed and in reality, the process delivered little to the Palestinians. Only 7% of their territories would be under Palestinian control – far from the idea of two states on which Oslo agreements were based.

Palestinians were not satisfied with their hard won gains. Israel was divided. Military leaders felt too much security had been given away. The religious right felt too much Jewish land had been surrendered. Extremists on both sides sought to derail the peace process.

By 2000, peace talks were at a stalemate. Although Israel appeared to be making concessions, they were not offering the independent statehood Palestinians seek. The proposal was for Palestinian districts to come under Israeli control.

On 28 September 2000 violent clashes erupted in Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem as a result of a provocative visit by Ariel Sharon to an Islamic holy site in Jerusalem. Years of frustrated peace talks and humiliation and hardship under Israeli occupation fuelled tensions. The clashes soon spread to other Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, leading to daily confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis.

The Israeli government's response was harsh. Soldiers fired at demonstrators killing and wounding many Palestinian civilians. Palestinian towns under PNA control were reoccupied. Palestinian government buildings were besieged and destroyed. Palestinian houses were bombed and bulldozed to attack suspected terrorists and clear land for security reasons. Repressive curfews were enforced. The borders were effectively closed cutting Palestinians off from their jobs in Israel. Checkpoints hampered Palestinians mobility. The UN condemned Israel's excessive use of force against Palestinians and called for a return to negotiations (Resolution 1322, 2000).

Violence continued seemingly unabated. Suicide bombers and Palestinians terrorists threaten Israeli civilians. Jewish settlers and Israeli soldiers attack Palestinians. The repressive occupation (see

section 6) by Israeli forces has destroyed Palestinian economic and social well being. Palestinian homes are destroyed for settlements, the West Bank Wall and in the search for or punishment of Palestinian terrorists.

The Road Map seeks to offer some hope towards a peaceful political solution. The plan is based on the belief that the only solution is two independent states. Extremist views on both sides are hardening. The voices of those advocating for peace are being drummed out by both Israeli and Palestinian voices calling for retribution and retaliation. It is not yet clear how committed the leaders and the people are to the **Road Map** and seeking a sustainable peace that allows two states to live side by side.

Both sides are suffering:

Israelis and Palestinians who are killed in the conflict are held up as martyrs. Moral supremacy is sometimes sought through the human toll each side experiences. But there is huge suffering and loss of life on both sides. Neither Israelis nor Palestinians deserve to be killed and the rising death toll should be a major impetus to seeking a non-violent way forward.

September 29 2000 – August 7 2003: 2,421 Palestinian deaths and 23,245 injuries (Palestinian Red Crescent Society)

www.palestinercs.org

September 29 2000 – July 17 2003: 816 Israeli deaths (572 civilians 244 security forces) and 5,616 injuries (3,965 civilians and 1,651 security forces) (Israeli Defence Force)

www.idf.il/daily_statistics/english/1.gif

www.idf.il

Section five : The current crisis

For people in Israel, the current crisis means living with the threat of suicide bombers killing and injuring indiscriminately as Israeli citizens go about their daily business. 17-19 May 2003 saw five attacks carried out over three days. These included a suicide bomber disguised as an orthodox Jew who blew up an early morning commuter bus in Jerusalem killing seven passengers, an attack at a shopping mall in Afula that killed two people and a suicide bomber on a bicycle who injured three Israeli soldiers in Gaza (Guardian Unlimited 17-19/05/03). It is these types of attacks that often lead Israelis to demand greater security and a government crackdown on Palestinians.

How the situation escalates:

A report by Art Gish, Christian Peacemakers Team, Hebron 25/1/2003

In the summer of 2001, a small group of five to ten Israeli settlers confiscated a hill belonging to Palestinian farmers at the north end of the Beqa'a Valley, near the Harsina Settlement, east of Hebron. The settlers erected a few primitive structures and began a new "illegal" (according to current Israeli law) outpost.

From the beginning settlers harassed and threatened the Palestinians living next to the new outpost and destroyed their property. The settlers prevented the farmers from going onto their land. They shot at children and stole a tractor, as well as other machines, tools and animals. They destroyed many trees and 400 grape vines and assaulted more than twenty of their neighbours.

Friday evening, January 17, 2003, two Palestinian gunmen went to this illegal outpost, shot and killed Natanel Ozeri, and wounded others. Settlers in the house and Israeli soldiers then killed the two gunmen. The killing of Ozeri greatly escalated an already tense situation.

On Saturday and Sunday Palestinians estimated that possibly 2,000 settlers came to the area on Sunday for memorial services.

The assembled settlers poured their anger out on the Palestinian neighbors who hid in their homes. Two Palestinians were injured and taken to a hospital on Saturday and four more on Sunday. The settlers vandalized ten cars, two of which they burned. They broke the windows of about twenty homes and destroyed property around the homes. They burned Palestinian clothes and other possessions. Israeli soldiers stood by and watched.

The events in Hebron are a microcosm of what is happening all over the Occupied Territories—massive land confiscation and settlement expansion, retaliation and counter retaliation. Fear and anger increase on both sides.

Can anyone in the world intervene to halt this growing tragedy for both sides?

 www.cpt.org/archives.php

"I sat behind the driver and noticed nothing unusual during the journey," said Nurit Warhaftig, 78. "I stood up to get off the bus after it stopped about 30 meters from my home, then heard a tremendous explosion. Everything was destroyed and people started screaming".

On 6 March 2003, a suicide bomber blew himself up on a packed bus in Hafia. 17 people died and more than 30 were wounded. "After what happened today, I appreciate every moment even more ... Life is for living. I just want to walk in the street and live again as I did before, said Warhaftig

The bus driver was among those injured. "What can we do?" asked his cousin, Henry Jarous, 31, also an Egged bus driver. "We have to live with this situation. It's our job and we have to do our best. ... I know one thing the driver did not suspect him or he would not have been allowed on the bus ... if I see someone suspicious waiting at a bus stop, I pull up 20 to 30 meters beyond and observe him closely as he approaches. Then I watch his body language as he boards the bus. Every driver acts like that nowadays we have to," he said.

A nearby office worker said it sounded like a war had started and a missile had fallen on the building. Although there had been Palestinian attacks in Haifa there was a feeling that the city and its residents were distant from the intensity of the violence. "Now we have felt with the same intensity that we are also on the front line," she said.

The Jerusalem Post 5/3/03

Feeding on the violence

The conflict in Israel/Palestine has been characterised by violence and counter violence throughout its history. It is not helpful to argue over who threw the first stone. Waves of attacks have been met by repression, which fuels the hopelessness and frustration that leads to more violence and is met with yet more retaliation. It is an escalating cycle that leads both sides further away from peace. When suicide bombers attack Israeli citizens it increases popular support for a hard-line response. When Israel responds to violent attacks by demolishing houses of suspected militants, killing bystanders in assassination attempts and invoking repressive security measures in the Palestinian Territories, it increases hard-line attitudes against the existence of the State of Israel. The violence perpetrated by both sides drowns out the voices calling for peace.

The World Council of Churches

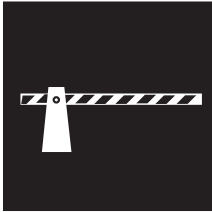
“Joins its voice with those many Christians, Muslims and Jews in the region and around the world who have strongly deplored all acts of violence related to this conflict, including:

- Israel’s military invasion and reoccupation of the Palestinian territories, extra-judicial executions of Palestinian leaders, killing of Palestinian civilians, application of collective punishments, and destruction of Palestinian homes and property in Israel and the occupied territories; and
- all acts of terror against civilians in Israel and in the occupied territories, including especially the growing and deeply troubling practice of organized and indiscriminate suicide bombings”

World Council of Churches 2/09/2002



Section six : Life under occupation: The humanitarian crisis



Palestinians have been living under Israeli occupation since 1967. During that time they have seen their homes and land confiscated for Jewish settlements and Israeli security. They have lost their livelihoods as olive groves, fruit orchards, and farms have been destroyed. According to one Israeli peace group, over 8000 houses Palestinian homes have been demolished in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 1967. Water use has been restricted and electricity supplies disrupted.

Israel's policy of house demolitions seeks to confine Palestinians to small enclaves, leaving most of the land free for Israeli settlement. Israel has built 350 kilometers of highways and by-pass roads in the West Bank, linking Jewish settlements (see section 7) to Israel proper while creating barriers to Palestinian movement. Palestinians are unable to move and work freely, to market their goods, to live normal lives. They have faced harassment and humiliation from the occupying forces, living under constant surveillance with their mobility restricted.

The second Intifada has brought increasing hardship in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Internal closure, curfews and roadblocks have practically separated the West Bank from the Gaza Strip, as well as refugee camps, cities and towns from each other. Israeli soldiers seem trigger-happy and enjoy humiliating Palestinians at checkpoints. The policy is tearing apart lives and communities.

There are severe access and mobility restrictions on people and goods and this has had a drastic impact on the Palestinian economy and the living conditions of the people. Unable to move freely, Palestinians cannot easily get to their work, visit family or access medical care or education. Transport of goods to market and outside and between the Occupied Palestinian Territories is greatly restricted. Ambulances are regularly fired at and delayed at roadblocks. Israel claims they are sometimes used to transport militants. There are many documented cases of women going into labour at checkpoints, as the Ambulance cannot get through to reach the hospital. Deaths and complications have resulted from the delays. The West Bank wall is further hindering movement, separating villages from their agricultural lands and jobs, and isolating them into small enclaves. Some Israeli human rights groups question if it is a deliberate policy to clear Palestinians off the land.

“You travel the same road the Wise Men took after presenting themselves to King Herod and following the star to see Jesus in the manger. Today you have to pass through army checkpoints. This is not about security. Often they are manned by teenagers who on one occasion did not even look at our Palestinian guide’s pass. These checkpoints are there to harass and grind down the Palestinian people. You may have a pass and still not be let through. It depends who is on duty. You try again the next day in the hope there is a more lethargic officer who will let you through as your pass permits.”

John P. Butler Anglican Chaplain, University of Wales, Bangor

In July 2003 Mazal Afari, 65, of Moshav Kfar Yavetz was killed when a suicide bomber blew himself up inside her family home. The blast reverberated throughout the quiet, religious agricultural community in the Sharon area, less than two kilometres from the line that separates Israel from the territories. The attack left locals worried about their safety. “I’m frightened,” said Michal Lotan, a mother of two children. “It could easily have been us. Anyone can walk through the surrounding groves into the villages around here. If there were a fence separating us from the territories, this would not have happened,” she said.

The Jerusalem Report 9/7/2003



The Huwara checkpoint is located just outside Nablus, on the main road from Jerusalem.

WCC-EAPPI/Sune

Poverty and malnutrition are now rampant. Health conditions are deteriorating as a result of breakdown in the provision of normal services such as vaccinations. Harvests and fishing are disrupted and hundreds of small businesses have either collapsed or have closed down temporarily. Unemployment is increasing. As a result families have no income and people's purchasing power is diminishing to the point that many have sold their household possessions to buy food.

In 1999 20.1%, a fifth of Palestinians, lived below the UN poverty line (US\$2 per day per person). In 2000, before the second intifada began, it had climbed to 30.7%. Today, 60% of all Palestinians - a figure that rises to 80% in parts of the Gaza Strip - live below the poverty line. Unemployment was 10% of the labour force in September 2000. Now it stands at 53% of the total workforce although in Gaza it exceeds 70%. At least 250,000 Palestinians of working age have no employment. This number climbs to over 600,000 during curfews, at which time unemployment affects from one-third to two-thirds of the population. 20% of all families have no income. The World Food Programme is providing food to approximately 1 million Palestinians, almost one in three people.

Christian observers like World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniers are sending regular reports of what life is like under Israeli Occupation. See

[www http://www2.wcc-coe.org/eappi.nsf](http://www2.wcc-coe.org/eappi.nsf)

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) has a team of peacemakers based in Hebron. The team is trained in documentation, observation, and non-violent intervention, and their very presence can make a striking difference in explosive situations. The CPT briefings from Hebron give an indication of life under occupation as Israeli forces respond to the current intifada. See

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

Living with the Wall

A young Palestinian woman in Jayyus has struggled to support her family. There are 6 children and her husband is partially disabled and can't earn much. So she trained as a seamstress to bring in some additional income. Through hard work and determination, and selling her wedding gold, the family saved enough money to extend their house and buy some land to grow olive trees. There is a local saying that if you have olive oil and bread you will never be hungry. This past harvest was the best they have had. But one day when the woman was down among her trees, she noticed red and blue markers. She asked what they meant. They signified where the new wall would be - right through her plot. There was nothing she could do. When the people came to clear the land she watched them from her house - first cutting the tops of the trees, then cutting the trunks, and finally uprooting what was left - "shaving the land" is what it is called.

Clarence Musgrave, Church of Scotland minister in Jerusalem, Circular Letter No. 124, April 2003.

Reports from the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees, Middle East Council of Churches: Some examples of the 57 ambulance delays in January 2003.

- Nablus 1 January 2003 (01:10 pm): a PRCS ambulance transported the body of a 10 day old infant named Abderrahman Samer Ahmad Hussein who died as Israeli soldiers delayed his family at Kassarat checkpoint.
- Tulkarem 8 January 2003 (07:25 am): Israeli soldiers denied access to a PRCS ambulance on its way to Saida village to attend a wounded person. After a delay of 1 hour and 20 minutes, and after the Israeli pull out from the village, the ambulance entered but the injured man had died.
- Nablus 18 January 2003 (12:24 am): PRCS EMS team was stopped and held at gunpoint by Israeli soldiers while responding to a call from a woman in labour. The soldiers forced them to turn back.

"Palestinians are frequently stopped and ordered to kneel, undress or stand with their hands over their heads - a process that can last several hours." World Council of Churches

Section six : Life under occupation: The humanitarian crisis



At Toufah the wait can be for a few hours to a couple of days.

WCC-EAPPI/Sune

'We wait for hours at the checkpoint'

"We have a very early season for seedless grapes, which gives them great value for export.

They can only be grown in the Jordan Valley, nowhere else. Normally they sell at NIS 15 per kilo, but with the closure they fetch only NIS 2-3. Before cropping, the cost to produce is NIS 6 per kilo. We have to compete against Israeli produce enjoying a 40% subsidy. We are suspicious about the treatment we get at checkpoints. We are made to wait for four or five hours to cross a checkpoint, by which time the grapes are beginning to rot and we cannot sell them at market." Muhammad, grape farmer

'I have not worked a single day'

Ramadan lives with his ten children, including three married sons and their families. Altogether there are 16 people in the household. "I used to work in a soap factory, just over the Green Line, for 20 years. It was before Oslo. We used to work six or seven days a week without interruption. I used to make NIS 3,400 (US\$775) monthly. After Oslo I worked only five or six days per month. We had to go through checkpoints and clear our ID cards with the soldiers. If it was raining the soldiers would hold the ID card in the rain so that it became ruined. I could see it was deliberate. So every two months or so, the pass had to be changed, which wasted time and effort. Before Oslo, the passes lasted for longer and the checkpoints were much easier... Now I cannot even leave the village."

Christian Aid 2003

House Demolitions

In Jerusalem 120 Christian homes are to be demolished, according to the Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHN). They were built by a group of limited-income Palestinian Christian families who came together as the Arab Orthodox Housing Project to build a new life. The families obtained a 99-year lease from their Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, 22 years ago and then began the slow and difficult process of organising and saving enough money to start construction.

"We were renters for 40 years," said Dalal Awad, a mother of five. "We saved for 22 years and built this home with our neighbours. It cost \$42,000. We built it with our hearts, our own labour. Now the Israelis want to kill our dream."

A year ago the first families moved in, even though Israel refused to provide electricity and the road to the homes was not completed. More than 40 families now live there. The entire project will house 850 people. Hanan Bannourah, her father, 82, and her mother, 78, settled in March 2002, as did her brother's family of seven in a neighbouring unit. "The Israelis bulldozed our first home in 1991. We saved and saved to build our new home."

Then, at the end of May 2003, Israeli police and soldiers told them they planned to destroy it. Israeli courts recently rejected the residents' appeal. "Israel wants to protect their settlers just over the hill," says Ms Bannourah. "They are trying to surround Bethlehem with their new settlements, and to cut it off from Jerusalem. They are trying to take over all of Palestine."

A new Israeli bypass road is being built to Har-Homa that will surround and then cut right through Beit-Sahour. Har-Homa will house 30,000 Israeli Jewish settlers. Beit-Sahour consists of Christians and Muslims living side by side, resisting the Israeli military occupation. According to the Oslo Agreement, Beit-Sahour is part of Area B, which means it is supposed to be under joint control of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The municipality is supposed to have control over land use.

The Arab Orthodox Housing Project received permits from Beit-Sahour to build, and was on the verge of completing the entire project when Israel sent its demolition order. Suddenly Israel claimed the land is in Area C and therefore completely under its control. No one knows when the Israeli Army plans to destroy the homes. But the residents are not waiting. "We know that when Israel decrees an order they do not care whether families will be made homeless."

"If necessary, I will build a tent here. Our dream will not die. I am not leaving," says Ms. Bannourah.

For more information on house demolitions see

www.icahd.org/eng

Section seven : Jewish settlements



'Seven settlers killed in carefully planned raid - the first fatal attack by militants since reoccupation of West Bank'

The Guardian July 17, 2002

Violence carried out by or targeted at settlers is a regularly reported feature of the Israel/Palestine conflict. The settlers are civilian, Israeli inhabitants of Jewish enclaves or settlements established by Israel within the **Occupied Palestinian Territories**. The settlements vary in size and social organisation (some are cooperatives, others are regular settlements overseen by a local committee or residents' council) but all operate as Israeli towns and cities. They come under Israeli law and have official institutions such as police stations, courts, councils and schools, and regular community facilities such as places of worship, workplaces and retail zones. In many settlements, the inhabitants commute to their jobs in Israel, enjoying the lower cost housing of the settlements. But the settlements are not Israeli towns. They are civilian enclaves within military controlled and occupied land that is outside the established borders of Israel. According to the United Nations, US, Palestinians, World Council of Churches and most other commentators, the presence and continued expansion of settlements is a major flashpoint in the Israel/Palestine conflict and Israel's failure to freeze settlement building or dismantle existing ones is a critical obstacle to peace negotiations.

How are the settlements contributing to the conflict?

1: The settlements are illegal under international law.

The UN has stated that the settlements are illegal under international law and a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which Israel has signed and ratified. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) states that occupying powers "shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies". The UN Security Council has issued resolutions calling on Israel to dismantle existing settlements and urgently cease the establishment, construction and planning of new settlements. Almost all states, including New Zealand, agree that the settlements are illegal.

2: The settlements are creating new facts on the ground.

Israeli settlements are changing the demographic and physical nature of the land, strengthening Israeli claims to the area originally assigned to a Palestinian state by the 1947 UN Partition Plan. According to the Foundation for Middle East Peace (2002), settlements and their boundaries now enclose almost 10% of West Bank territory. "No-go" areas between 70 and 500 metres wide around each settlement and every military installation in the occupied territories are claiming more land. An Israeli report on settlements says Israel has seized control of some 50% of the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem.

(B'Tselem 2002)

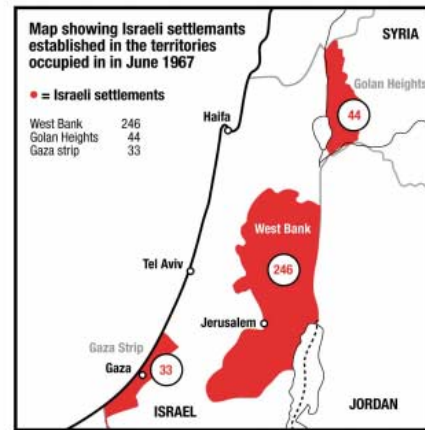
Beit Sahour is a Christian suburb of Bethlehem. These are the impressions of Anglican Minister John Butler visiting from Wales in 2002.

"There are Jewish settlements surrounding Bethlehem, ugly ecologically disastrous developments looking down over the Palestinian town below as a fortress might. The message is clear. There are 28 settlements around the town with Israeli-only bypass roads to carry their inhabitants off without using ordinary roads. ... Everywhere you see the landscape torn up while massive roads are built for the exclusive use of Israelis and the military. The plan is to force people out. 200 families in Beit Sahour have recently gone, hounded by curfews,

military incursions, unemployment, the demolition of houses and much more. It's relatively easy for Christians to get visas to go to the United States, if they have the money and connections there. Generally speaking the Christians are better educated and wealthier. It suits the Israeli Government well to see them go. If it can be shown that they have only a Muslim population to deal with it will be easier to retain the world's support for their policies."

John Butler (2002)

Section seven : Jewish settlements



3: The settlements justify an Israeli military presence.

The presence of Israeli citizens in the settlements justifies the posting of Israeli forces to protect the enclaves. Moshe Dayan (a former Israeli Military Commander, Chief of Staff and Cabinet minister) says that without the settlements “we cannot keep the army in those territories. Without them the IDF would be a foreign army ruling a foreign population” (Foundation for Middle East Peace 2002). Military protection for the settlers includes roadblocks, army bases, border controls, secret police surveillance, aerial patrols, and Israeli-only by pass roads. All these impact on the daily life of Palestinians.

4: The settlements fragment Palestinian territory.

The land required for settlements, safety “buffer” zones around the sites, and by pass roads for safe Israeli access, are crisscrossing Palestinian territory, isolating Palestinian communities from each other and dividing the land into small parts rather than a unified whole. There are concerns that this is making a future Palestinian state untenable, as unless the settlements are dismantled, Palestine would be a collection of fragmented communities.

5: Palestinian land is confiscated for the settlements.

Land required for settlements and the infrastructure supporting the Jewish communities is taken from Palestinians. Israel declares the land “state land”, manipulating the 1858 Ottoman Lands Law that still applied when Israel occupied the territories in 1967. Israel also seizes land for “public” or “military” needs or declares it “abandoned assets”. In many cases, Palestinian residents are unaware that their land was registered in the name of the state, and by the time they discover this fact, it is too late to appeal. The burden of proof always rests with the Palestinian claiming ownership of the land. Even if Palestinians can show ownership (an expensive and time consuming process), the land may still be registered in the name of the state on the grounds that it was transferred to the settlement “in good faith.” In December 2002, 70 Palestinian homes and properties in Hebron were requisitioned for demolition so the street could be widened, giving settlers a Palestinian-free passage to connect two Jewish settlements.

6: The settlements violate Palestinian rights.

The confiscation of land and the military presence needed to support the settlements violates Palestinian rights. Palestinians are denied the rights to property, freedom of movement, and to adequate standards of living. The settlers control a disproportionate amount of land and water resources.

7: Preferential treatment and discrimination is institutionalised.

Israel has created two sets of law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories—one for settlers and one for Palestinians—thereby institutionalising discrimination based on nationality. Palestinians live under military rule and the restrictions on movement and daily hardship that brings. Settlements are under Israeli law. The designation of roads and areas as Israeli only is a further example of discrimination and the preferential treatment accorded to Israeli settlers.

8: The settlements fuel tension.

The settlements fuel Israeli/Palestinian tensions. The confiscation of Palestinian land, settler harassment of Palestinians, and the hardships imposed on Palestinians living around the settlements all provoke Palestinian resentment and hostility and are used by extremists to support anti-Israeli violence. The illegality of the occupation is also used to justify a violent response. Some Palestinians have targeted settlers in attacks ranging from stones thrown at cars, shootings and the laying of explosives.

Some settlers have also targeted Palestinians in attacks ranging from property damage and vandalism, physical and verbal harassment, stone throwing and shooting. The Palestinian West Bank village of Khirbat Yanun has been emptied of its 150 inhabitants after a campaign of harassment and violence from Jewish settlers living on the hills surrounding the village. After a year of stone throwing, window smashing, physical assaults and vandalism the Palestinian people who have lived there for 7 generations no longer feel safe in their homes (New York Times 21/10/02).

Both sides have unleashed a cycle of violence and retaliation.



'They burned the crops': Khadr's story

"Yesha settlement stole 300 dunums (75 acres) of our land. Last January [2002] they burnt our crops and our farmhouse and shot at us. The first time they came, they just burned the crops. The second time they also destroyed our greenhouses. We suffered a loss of NIS 190,000, affecting four families...We should not stay long in this field. They will be watching us from that watchtower now and may start shooting at us."

Christian Aid 2003

Israel's view

Israel has been building Jewish settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 1967, although the process has accelerated since the 1990s. Between 1993 and 2000 the number of settlers on the West Bank increased by almost 100%. In July 2002 there were an estimated 130 Jewish settlements in the West Bank, 16 in Gaza and 11 in East Jerusalem (FMEP 2002). Estimates of the total settler population range from 365,000 to 400,000.

All Israeli governments have sanctioned and built settlements, purportedly for security reasons and to support the voluntary return of Jews to their ancient homeland (territory that was excluded from the borders of a Jewish state in the [UN Partition](#)). In practice, the settlements are working to consolidate Israeli control of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, and to prevent the emergence of a Palestinian state.

Most settlers are attracted by the higher standard of living they enjoy. Settlers receive generous housing loans, cheap housing and land, exemption from tuition fees, free school transportation, and reductions in income tax. Incentives are offered to attract quality teachers and social workers, investors and business. The areas receive higher per capita government funding for infrastructure and services than communities within the borders of Israel.

Other settlers are attracted for religious or ideological reasons. Jewish settlers in Hebron are staking a claim to the Palestinian town as the second holiest site to the Jewish people, the first Jewish City in the Land of Israel, home of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. They argue their presence secures Jewish access to the site, off-limits to Jews for 700 years, from 1267 to 1967. "Hebron is a Jewish city," says Orit Strock, a settler and mother of 11. "A people who come and live in a place for 10 or 20 or even 100 years, it doesn't become their country. A country belongs to the people who lived in that country for thousands of years" (Sydney Morning Herald 9/12/02). Many Israelis, both religious and secular, believe the territories to be part of the ancestral Land of Israel and see settlement as reclaiming their rightful land.

Israel does not believe the settlements are illegal. Israel argues the Geneva Convention does not apply because it does not accept that the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem are occupied territory. The Government claims that the future status of the territories is yet to be decided and until that is negotiated, Israeli claims to the land are as valid as those of the Palestinians. It also argues that many of the Jewish settlements are on the sites of former Jewish occupation, making the settlement a return to ancestral land rather than an occupying power settling its own population in occupied territories.

Israeli peace groups view the settlements as illegal, a drain on the Israeli economy, and an obstacle to peace. In early 2003 a poll showed 63% of Israelis would support dismantling the settlements to resolve the conflict (Reuters January 2003). An earlier poll of Israeli settlers showed 68% would obey a democratic decision by the Israeli government requesting they withdraw from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, 6% would resist, 2% would resist by all means (CNN 25/7/2002). Settler youth, raised in an environment of ongoing conflict and hostility with their Palestinian neighbours, have already attacked Israeli police and military personnel attempting to evict them from non-official settler outposts (eg: New York Times 21/10/02).

Future Status

The future status of the settlements will be a key component of any peace settlement. Most commentators believe the settlements must be dismantled for a viable independent Palestinian state to be established. Israeli peace groups calling for the dismantling of the settlements are also calling for compensation of settlers who will need to move back to Israel.



The palm trees, lush green and beaches of Neve Dekalm, one of the Jewish settlements bisecting the Palestinian township of Mawasi, are a marked contrast to the Palestinian area.

WCC-EAPPI/Sune

Section eight : Working for peace: Views from Israel and Palestine



The question of Israel/Palestine has often been dominated by extremist views: Fundamentalist Arabs and Muslims who refuse to acknowledge the existence of Israel and want to destroy the Jewish State and Fundamentalist Zionists who believe all of Palestine and parts of Jordan are Jewish territory and support the forcible expulsion of all Palestinians. There are extremists and proponents of terror and violence on both sides and it is these views that make the headlines. But beyond this is a wide range of views and perspectives from people living in Israel/Palestine reflecting their diversity of race, religion, and political ideology.

Israeli peace movement

PEACE NOW was founded in 1978 by reserve officers and soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces. PEACE NOW calls for the Israeli government to seek peace with the Palestinian people through negotiations and mutual compromise and supports territorial concessions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. "Only peace will bring security to Israel and ensure the future of our people." PEACE NOW recognises there are 2 peoples in the land and calls for the recognition of the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination in their own state, alongside Israel. They have worked to bring about a change in Israeli public opinion. Less than 1% were in favour of the establishment of a Palestinian state in 1977, by 1997 50% were.

[www http://www.peacenow.org.il/English.asp](http://www.peacenow.org.il/English.asp)

B'TSELEM, the Israeli Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories was established in 1989 by a group of prominent academics, attorneys, journalists, and Knesset (Israeli parliament) members. It endeavours to educate the Israeli public and policymakers about human rights violations in the Occupied Territories, combat the phenomenon of denial prevalent among the Israeli public, and help create a human rights culture in Israel. B'Tselem documents and publishes human rights violations including torture, fatal shootings by security forces, restriction on movement, expropriation of land and discrimination in planning and building, administrative detention, and settler violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. They work to make the Israeli public aware so they can't say; "We didn't know."

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

The **Israeli committee against house demolitions (ICAHD)**: is a non-violent, direct-action group originally established to oppose and resist Israeli demolition of Palestinian houses in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. They also resist land confiscation, settlement expansion, construction of by-pass roads and the uprooting of fruit and olive trees. ICAHD works closely with local Palestinian organisations. "As Israelis, we believe that the only chance for a genuine peace is one that enables the Palestinians to establish what we have, a viable and truly sovereign state of their own. A just peace will also provide all the peoples of our region with the security, dignity, freedom and economic opportunities they deserve." Two states is the only solution because, if Palestinians are given citizenship in a state incorporating the entire Land of Israel, Israel ceases to be a Jewish state yet, "if Palestinians are not given citizenship in a state incorporating the entire Land of Israel, Israel becomes an apartheid regime."

[www http://www.icahd.org/eng/](http://www.icahd.org/eng/)

Jewish Religious Leaders

Rabbis for Human Rights: RHR is comprised of Reform, Orthodox, Conservative and Reconstructionist rabbis and students who want to give voice to the Jewish tradition of human rights. RHR was founded in 1988, in response to serious abuses of human rights by the Israeli military authorities in the suppression of the Intifada. The Rabbis were concerned at the indifference many of Israeli's religious community seemed to show towards the suffering of innocent Palestinian people. RHR believes "human rights abuses are not compatible with the age-old Jewish tradition of humaneness and moral responsibility or the Biblical concern for 'the stranger in your midst' - even in the face of the danger to public order and safety which the uprising represented." The group says,

"The survival of the Jewish people will be determined not only by its physical acumen, but also, by its moral steadfastness. We remain deeply committed to seeking reconciliation with our Palestinian neighbours, and believe that a just peace can and must be pursued. ... We of Rabbis for Human Rights feel compelled to speak out, along with other Israeli human rights organizations, to call on our government to cease violations of Palestinian human rights, even in times of war. We are aware that many soldiers are taking personal risks in order to avoid civilian casualties. Yet we are also aware that human rights violations are taking place. Some acts are the aberrant behaviour of individuals, but others are a matter of official policy."

[www http://www.rhr.israel.net/overview.shtml](http://www.rhr.israel.net/overview.shtml)

Help the Palestinians harvest their olives!

In October 2002 Israeli peace activists joined West Bank Palestinians in the olive harvest to help Palestinians protect their livelihood and secure food. The harvest was delayed by closures and sieges. In some places soldiers kept Palestinian farmers away from their own orchards and Israeli settlers attacked villagers as they attempted to harvest. Numerous shooting incidents were reported, with many injured and one dead, in addition to beatings with rifle butts and rocks. If the harvest had been delayed much longer, the olives would have been ruined. Israeli peace activists acted as human shields and helped with the harvesting work.

Israeli Academics

A group of Israeli academics has organised a petition against Israeli actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It describes the official response of the Israeli government to Palestinian violence as “a version of State Terrorism, and rather than directed at stopping the circle of bloodshed seems intent on increasing it”.

Another group of Israeli academics has formed the organisation Professors for a Strong Israel (PSI) to oppose the academic peace movement. PSI believes that the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights

are integral parts of the Land of Israel. They are “categorically opposed to yielding control of any part of the Land of Israel to any foreign entity” and campaign against Israeli support for a Palestinian state.

Conscientious Objectors : We have decided to say: No!

A growing number of reservists in the Israeli army are refusing to serve in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The conscientious objectors, or “refuseniks” have signed a declaration to refuse service that is not in defence of Israel. They argue that Israel’s military response to the infatida is not a fight for the survival of the state. “We are fighting to maintain our role as conqueror and occupier of the territories. Our feeling is that the mutual acts of terror are not inevitable; the situation can be changed”.

[www http://www.couragetorefuse.org/defaulteng.asp](http://www.couragetorefuse.org/defaulteng.asp)

As of August 2003 1139 army reservists have refused to serve.

[www http://www.refusersolidarity.net](http://www.refusersolidarity.net)

Declaration by Israeli Conscientious Objectors

- We, reserve combat officers and soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, who were raised upon the principles of Zionism, sacrifice and giving to the people of Israel and to the State of Israel, who have always served in the front lines, and who were the first to carry out any mission, light or heavy, in order to protect the State of Israel and strengthen it.
- We, combat officers and soldiers who have served the State of Israel for long weeks every year, in spite of the dear cost to our personal lives, have been on reserve duty all over the Occupied Territories, and were issued commands and directives that had nothing to do with the security of our country, and that had the sole purpose of perpetuating our control over the Palestinian people. We, whose eyes have seen the bloody toll this Occupation exacts from both sides.
- We, who sensed how the commands issued to us in the Territories, destroy all the values we had absorbed while growing up in this country.
- We, who understand now that the price of Occupation is the loss of IDF’s human character and the corruption of the entire Israeli society.
- We, who know that the Territories are not Israel, and that all settlements are bound to be evacuated in the end.
- We hereby declare that we shall not continue to fight this War of the Settlements.
- We shall not continue to fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people.
- We hereby declare that we shall continue serving in the Israel Defense Forces in any mission that serves Israel’s defense.
- The missions of occupation and oppression do not serve this purpose – and we shall take no part in them.

Section eight : Working for peace: Views from Israel and Palestine

There are fears that as Palestinian Christians escape the violence, it becomes easier to represent the conflict as Jew against Muslim and that the presence of Palestinian Christians, who can trace their ancestry to the time of Jesus, will be lost from the Holy Land.

The Jerusalem Churches

On March 9 2002, the thirteen patriarchs and heads of churches in Jerusalem (including Greek Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical churches) issued a call to “All the people in this Holy Land, Palestinians and Israelis” affirming that “War shelling and destruction will not bring justice and security; rather it will intensify hatred and bitterness.” They stated that “the way the present Israeli Government is dealing with the situation makes neither for security nor for a just peace” and that “Israeli security is dependant on Palestinian freedom and justice.” They also urged the Palestinian people to end “every kind of violent response”.

[www http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/bulletin16.html#2](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/behindthenews/bulletin16.html#2)

Women

Jewish and Palestinian women have come together to work for a just peace. The Coalition of Women for a Just Peace want:

- an end to the occupation
- the full involvement of women in negotiations for peace
- establishment of the state of Palestinian side by side with the state of Israel based on the 1967 borders
- the recognition of Jerusalem as the shared capital of two states
- Israel to take its share of responsibility for the results of the 1948 war, and cooperate in finding a just solution for the Palestinian refugees
- Equality, inclusion and justice for Palestinian citizens of Israel
- Opposition to the militarism that permeates Israeli society
- Equal rights for women and all residents of Israel
- Social and economic justice for Israel's citizens and integration in the region.

Bat Shalom is an Israeli national feminist grassroots organization of Jewish and Palestinian Israeli women working together for a genuine peace grounded in a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict, respect for human rights, and an equal voice for Jewish and Arab women within Israeli society. “We, the Jewish and Palestinian Israeli women of Bat Shalom, call upon all women to join our active struggle for peace and equality. We refuse to silently bear witness to the destruction of the hope and future of a peaceful reconciliation.”

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

Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW) is Bat Shalom's Palestinian partner. JCW's main objective is women's empowerment for community activism and political participation. They work in the areas of advocacy, women's leadership, peace building and peaceful resistance to the Israeli occupation. They believe that “mutual recognition of each other's individual and collective rights paves the way for peace making”. Declaring “there has been enough bloodshed” and that women have been most affected by the enormous suffering, hatred and dehumanisation yet the least involved in finding solutions, they call on women to come together to break the vicious cycle of violence. “We believe that true and just peace can be achieved, but only between equals, a Palestinian state (in the territories occupied in 1967) alongside the state of Israel. Only then will both people live in security and dignity.”

[www www.j-c-w.org](http://www.j-c-w.org)



A young Palestinian girl joins a peaceful protest in Ramallah, September 2002.

WCC-EAPPI/Sune

Palestinian Christians

Dr Bernard Sabella heads the MECC Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees. He sees being a Palestinian Christian as enjoying a rich heritage that combines aspects of the three monotheistic religions.

“For many in the West, Palestinian or Arab Christians is a contradiction in terms. One journalist once asked me: How can you be a Christian and an Arab at the same time? I tried to explain that Arab is the nationality or culture and that the nationality and culture do not contradict the fact that I am a Christian or a Muslim or even a Jew. “

His Christian faith takes its roots from the Old Testament and there is “an important theological connection between my Christian faith and Judaism”. As a Palestinian he has enjoyed excellent relations with his Muslim neighbours.

“We have lived the same experiences, went through difficult and pleasant times, worked together and stood side by side in hours of need or crisis. In the process, our children went to school with one another; they made friends, played together, visited one another and shared together the political, social and economic environment. Most important they got to know one another as people and not as stereotypes. This experiential sharing taught me to respect Islam and to appreciate the devotion and commitment of Muslims as they go around praying and being faithful to their religion. This living together made me touch base with the human face of my Muslim neighbours.”

Inside Israel, Palestinian Christians struggle to reconcile their Palestinians identity and Israeli citizenship.

- “We identify with the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. There is not a single (Palestinian) family inside Israel that does not have close family relations with someone in the West Bank... We have to do something when we see them suffering. Yet, in the Israeli media all the time we are asked: whose side are you on? Both, we say. We have the feeling that we are strangers in our own country. Always we are second-class citizens. We pay the same taxes but don't get the same benefits.”
- “There are 100,000 Christian Arabs in Israel (excluding the Occupied Territories). We are a minority within a minority. What can we do? We are forgotten”. Butler 2002

Wi'am: Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center

A grassroots organization, striving with other democratic forces in Bethlehem to build a democratic and just society. The Centre aims to improve the quality of relationships by addressing injustices rather than avenging them; dignifying persons on both sides of the conflict; promoting human rights and advocating for peace among all people.

 www.planet.edu/~alashlah/

Section nine : To share the land: Hopes for peace and reconciliation



The main hope for peace between Israel and the Palestinians is for recognition of each other as people so all parties can begin a dialogue based on mutual respect. The suffering and claims of both sides need to be acknowledged and their human rights respected.

It is not possible to return to a time when only Palestinians or Jews lived in the Holy Land, and indeed, such a time never existed. It is not possible to remove either people from the land. To do so would create yet more suffering and the displacement and homelessness of millions of people. Nothing would be solved. It is not possible for Israelis to be incorporated into a Palestinian state or for Palestinians to be incorporated into Israel. To do so would deny one people their rights to self-determination. The current situation cannot continue. Over fifty years of violence, occupation, and military repression have failed to bring peace or security for Israelis or Palestinians, and it is destroying the economic and social well being of both communities. The only way forward is to make a compromise work and to share the land between two independent states standing side by side.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the UN decision to partition Palestine, that act occurred at the will of the international community, and the international community must now work with Israel and the Palestinians to make that compromise happen. With Arab and Palestinian recognition of the state of Israel, the way is now clear for the final implementation of the two-state solution. What is needed now is for Israel to withdraw from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, for Israel and the international community to recognise an independent state of Palestine, and for the international community to guarantee both Palestine and Israel existence within internationally recognised and secure borders.

STATEMENT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 20 JUNE 2002

First and foremost, any lasting solution of this conflict can only be based on an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory and the withdrawal of Israel's settlements from it. There will be neither peace nor security as long as the occupation continues. Security Council resolution 242 identified the basic formula for ending this conflict 35 years ago: land for peace.

There is an international consensus on the establishment of a State of Palestine, living side-by-side in peace with its neighbour Israel, with both states enjoying internationally recognised, secure borders. Only an end to the occupation can make such a peace possible.

It is equally clear that there will be no political settlement in the absence of real security guarantees for Israel. The Palestinian Authority has failed to live up to its security obligations freely entered into in the Oslo agreements.

Even recognizing their limited capacity to act at present, the Palestinian Authority and its leadership must do more to de-legitimise terrorism among the public and to stop terrorists from attacking Israel. Israel has a right, like any state, to live within secure and recognized borders. Terrorism must be stopped — once and for all.

The Government of Israel, for its part, should stop all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Such activity is a fundamental obstacle to advancing the peace process and is also illegal under international law.

www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/

see Secretary-General/ Secretary-General's Documents

The World Council of Churches calls for the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces from Palestinian territories, to end its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories. The WCC believes that “the illegal occupation of Palestine must come to an end. It is at the root of the violence and at the root of all human rights abuses. Unless this is urgently addressed, there can be little hope for the respect of human rights nor for a just and lasting peace.”

World Council of Churches 2/4/2002

Resolution of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand General Assembly 2002

- “...express profound sorrow and deep concern for the situation in Israel-Palestine where a continuing cycle of violence is bringing only suffering and despair, and offer continuing prayer and support for the people involved
- offer support to all the Christian churches in the area in their difficult task of building peace and reconciliation
- condemn the attacks on innocent Israelis by Palestinian suicide bombers, gunmen and those who encourage them, as terror against innocent civilians is unacceptable to all civilized people
- condemn Israeli attacks against innocent civilians and calls on the Israeli Government to work to ensure the safety of Palestinian non-combatants
- ... affirm the conviction that justice demands a viable independent Palestinian state guaranteed by international treaty and action.”

Hoping for Peace

“The most important thing was we could save another person’s life. The donation was unconditional. Our role ended when we decided to donate.”

These were the inspiring words of the family of a young Jewish man killed in a suicide bomb attack in Israel. The Scottish student’s family decided to donate his vital organs and the recipient of his kidney in a lifesaving transplant was a young Palestinian girl. 7-year old Jasmin had been waiting for a donor for two years. She now has a new life thanks to the generosity and compassion of a Jewish family.

New Zealand Herald 24/9/2002

“I want peace, but only with justice.”

Palestinian youth are hoping for peace says 16-year old Abd. “We want to live like other people. My brother Ibrahim was injured by a bullet in his knee. He was going to play football when the Israelis started shooting. My brother’s friend was shot. My brother went to carry him, and then he was shot. He needs three months’ treatment but he will never play football again. My younger brother always has nightmares. He tells our mother what he dreams. I simply want a normal life, even for one day.”

Christian Aid 2003

Left: A non-violent protest for peace, Ramallah, September 2002. WCC-EAPPI/Sune



Section ten : One land, three faiths : Christian churches and the Israel-Palestine conflict



“As people of faith we uphold and defend the sanctity of all life, both Palestinian and Israeli and can not remain silent in the face of suffering, insecurity and fear of both peoples.”

World Council of Churches 5/12/2001

The Israel/Palestine conflict is often represented as a conflict between Jews and Muslims. But this simplification overlooks the minority Christian population in the area, the presence of Christian Churches, and the worldwide Christian connection to the land that was the birthplace firstly of the Hebrew faith and then Christ and Christianity. Christian teaching also calls on us to seek non-violent resolutions to conflict, support peace and reconciliation, and speak out against injustice. For all these reasons, Christian churches are involved in the ongoing conflict.

Christians are divided on the issue of Israel/Palestine. Some Christians take a pro-Israel position, arguing for Israel's right to all of Palestine and the need for Israel to take all necessary measures to protect itself and its citizens against (Muslim) Palestinian violence. They do not recognise the Palestinian right to an independent state and emphasise the horrific persecution Jews have endured throughout their history.

Underlying what has been termed “Christian Zionism” is the belief that the return of Jews to the Promised Land paves the way to the second coming of Christ.

Others in Christian churches take what is deemed a pro-Palestine position by speaking out against the injustices they witness in the region and against Palestinians and seeking a mutual compromise to the conflict. Churches based in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Middle East Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches and its global ecumenical partners view the Israeli occupation as illegal and the root cause of the current violence. They recognise the rights of both states to exist within secure borders side by side. They follow the Christian tradition of speaking out against injustice and standing with the weak and oppressed. While condemning the violence against Israeli citizens as well as violence against Palestinians, the ecumenical movement identifies the Palestinians as being in greatest need at the present time.

Some Christian Actions

As part of the Decade to Overcome Violence, the World Council of Churches (WCC) launched the ‘End the Illegal Occupation of Palestine: Support a Just Peace in the Middle East’ ecumenical campaign in 2002. The campaign aims to mobilise WCC member churches and ecumenical partners to work together for an end to the occupation and a negotiated, secure and just peace in the Holy Land that secures viable statehood for Palestine. Churches around the world are invited to participate in a collective effort of prayer, reflection and active solidarity with Palestinians and Israelis striving for an end to the occupation and true peace.

[www http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/palestine/campaign-home.html](http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/palestine/campaign-home.html)

As part of its actions on Palestine, the WCC has launched the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) whose mission is to accompany Palestinians and Israelis in their non-violent actions and concerted advocacy to end the occupation. Participants monitor and report on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and support Christian, Jewish and Muslim peace activists in their non-violent resistance. Ecumenical Accompaniers send regular reports of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. They record the firings at and delays of Ambulances, the disruption to Palestinian livelihoods, and the deaths and injuries from the latest clashes. They serve as witnesses to people's stories that are lost in the evening headlines and try to convey the suffering they see all around them. See

[www www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/palestine/eap.html](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/palestine/eap.html)

Several Christian groups including ACT (Action by Churches Together) International and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) provide humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees. MECC programmes provide health services, shelter, trauma counselling, food relief, and vocational training. They are working to empower and strengthen marginalised Palestinians and promote health and education. New Zealand is supporting the MECC's Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) through Christian World Service and NZAID emergency funding. The DSPR began working in the region in 1950. In Gaza the focus is on health, vocational training, relief and rehabilitation. In the West Bank the focus is on infrastructure, community development, land reclamation and the rehabilitation of refugees.



The DSPR is currently providing employment assistance to Palestinians who are no longer able to enter Israel for work. Short-term job opportunities are being funded to meet local needs in health and repair of water supplies and irrigation. DSPR is also providing food packages to families in need. They recognise that the delivery of food will also have a psychological benefit as families realise they have not been totally abandoned.

Section eleven : Overcoming the violence: What religions have to offer



Contributed by John H Roberts, Mission and Ecumenical Secretary, Methodist Church of New Zealand

Three different religions find themselves caught up in the Israel/Palestine conflict - Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. They are related through their common ancestor, the patriarch Abraham. Each claims the Holy Land as a special place. Though they have their own unique histories and different traditions, they hold many values and stories in common. Amongst their shared core values are a desire for peace and well-being, a commitment to social justice, and respect for neighbours.

At this time Judaism in Israel is struggling with the threat of Islamic suicide bombers and the challenge of the Israeli state with its superior military power in its conflict with the Palestinians. Islam has to contend with the illegal occupation of Palestinian land by Israel, the rise of militant extremism and the world's perception of Islam as a violent religion. Christianity is caught somewhere in the middle of this conflict, but has to contend with its own past history of violence and genocide against Muslims and Jews in the Holy Land and more recently the Holocaust.

It is to those life affirming values of peace, social justice and mutual respect that each faith community must hold if the conflict and violence are to be overcome. Here we briefly explore each of these positive values in the three religions, believing that they offer a way out of the conflict if all three religions are sufficiently committed to act on.

Judaism

Judaism offers us shalom or peace, as well as social justice or tsedeq. Tsedeq refers to a special consideration for the poor and down-trodden. It is contained in the Torah and received special attention in the prophetic writings. Norman Snaith, a British Hebrew Scriptures' scholar, stated that it is God's concern to establish tsedeq in the land. So it is about more than human ethics, because it is God's will that social justice should abound. Its root ts-d-q meant 'to be straight'. It is also identified with being righteous. It came to refer to that which is, or ought to be, firmly established and enduring in human affairs, namely the idea of social justice, especially for the oppressed. Tsedeq refers to God's standards for the world. It becomes the norm by which all behaviour must be judged.

The result of tsedeq is shalom, an overwhelming sense of joy and well-being motivated by God's love for all people. Hebrew scriptures scholar, Walter Brueggemann, an American Hebrew Scriptures scholar, says, "The persistent vision of joy, well-being, harmony, and prosperity is not captured in any single word or idea in the Bible, and a cluster of words is required to express its many dimensions and subtle nuances: love, loyalty, truth, grace, salvation, justice, blessing, righteousness. But the term that in recent discussions has been used to summarise that controlling vision is shalom. ... It bears tremendous freight – the freight of a dream of God that resists all our tendencies to division, hostility, fear, drivenness, and misery." According to Brueggemann shalom has many dimensions. It is well-being in the very midst of threats to life. It is a flourishing of a material, physical, and historical kind and not idyllic 'pie in the sky'. It is well-being of a very personal kind, but is also deliberately corporate, embracing the concept of a preferential option for the poor. In a special way shalom is the responsibility and burden of the powerful, for they are the ones held accountable for shalom. The word is also used as a greeting, but always carries the yearning for peace and wholeness for all.

On her "Judaism 101" website, Tracey Rich who writes from an Orthodox perspective, states, "Jewish law includes within it a blueprint for a just and ethical society, where no one takes from another or takes advantage of another, but everyone gives to one another and helps one another and protects one another." The Jewish Peace Fellowship on their website state that "The Bible itself yearned for and envisaged peace and demanded that the Jew pursue it. This is a central mitzvah, or commandment, in the Bible. Of traditional Judaism's 613 commandments, only justice and peace are not merely to be fulfilled in one's dwelling place but to be actively pursued everywhere." The Deuteronomic writer says, "Justice and only justice you shall pursue." The Psalmist bids God's people to "seek peace and pursue it." The Jewish Talmud states that "The world stands on three legs: truth, justice and peace." Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel has stated that "Religion's task is to cultivate: disgust for violence and lies; sensitivity to other people's suffering, the love of peace."

The values of social justice and peace are at the core of the Jewish faith and must not be lost sight of in the present Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

"The prophets tried to extend the horizon of our conscience and to impart to us a sense of divine partnership in our dealings with good and evil and in our wrestling with life's enigmas. They tried to teach us how to think in the categories of God: His holiness, justice and compassion."

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A philosophy of Judaism*, 1955, reprinted 1991, p 273

Section eleven : Overcoming the violence: What religions have to offer



The cross on the Greek Orthodox Church sits beside the minaret from a neighboring mosque in the West Bank village of Zababdeh. WCC-EAPPI/Joel

Islam

Islam too holds to the values of peace and social justice. Writing in “The Times of India” on the anniversary of the prophet Mohammed’s birth in February 2003, Andalib Akhter stated, “Islam advocates peace, fraternity and tranquility, not just for Muslims but for entire humankind. The very word Islam means surrender to the will of God on the one hand, and the establishment of peace, on the other. The word for peace in Arabic is *salaam*. When one Muslim greets another, he invokes peace: ‘salaam alaikum’ (peace be with you). . . Surrender to the will of Allah compels followers of Islam to strive for the establishment of peace in society.”

Imam Dr Abdul Jalil Sajid of the Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony in Britain states that, “The first and foremost basic right of a human being given by God, is the right to live in peace and security.” He says that suicide bombing and taking one’s own life is forbidden in Islam, as it is an abuse of the divine gift of life. Terrorist acts are seen from the perspective of Islamic law, as a crime – the crime of waging war against society. Sajid states, “Peace in Islam does not mean the absence of war, but the absence of oppression, corruption, injustice and tyranny. Islam considers that real peace can only be attained when justice prevails.” Islam only permits fighting in self-defence, in defence of religion, or on the part of those who have been forcibly expelled from their homes. War then is a last resort and is subject to the sacred law of *shariah*. It can only be taken up when the aim is to establish and assure justice, to annihilate oppression, and abolish tyranny.

Ashgar Ali Engineer, Institute of Islamic Studies in India, asks, “And what is the way of Allah? Allah’s way is of justice, Allah’s way is of protecting the rights of the poor and exploited. . . . The Qur’an again and again shows its sympathy for the weaker sections of society in which it includes, among others, the orphans, the widows, the poor and the exploited, the slaves and other politically or socially and economically oppressed people.” In the end, he says, “a real Muslim is one who despite being firm in his/her faith tradition, shows equal love and compassion for all human beings whether they belong to his faith tradition or not. The Qur’an calls upon Muslims “O you who believe, enter into complete peace.” Engineer says the reference here is to entering into peace whole-heartedly.

Islam clearly holds to the values of justice and peace, seeing them as inter-linked. They too must not be lost sight of in the present Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

Christianity

Christianity too is rooted in the values of peace and social justice. Walter Wink, Christian theologian and biblical scholar in the USA, sees Jesus’ ministry as taking shape in response to the domination systems of his day, whether of the politics of Rome or the Jewish religion. He writes, “Jesus challenged the Domination System of his day right where it affected men and women and the routine of their lives, in the everyday push and pull of relating to the institutions that shaped their lives. . . . Almost every sentence Jesus uttered was an indictment of the Domination System or the declaration of an alternative to it.” Jesus is seen as a prophet who repudiated the very premises of the domination system. In his beatitudes, his healings, and his table fellowship with outcasts, and sinners, Jesus declared God’s special concern for the oppressed. Jesus, according to Wink, is inaugurating “God’s domination-free order.”

This is also a violence-free instruction. Jesus followers were not only to love each other, they were to love even their enemies and do good to those who hated them. Jesus taught that if someone struck you on the cheek, you should turn the other so they could hit that too. He encouraged going the second mile. Jesus clearly rejected the military option as a way to redress grievances. But non-violence is not the same as non-resistance. Jesus does counsel resistance in the face of evil, but without violence. He encourages what Wink calls a third way, creative responses that seek to break the cycle of humiliation and expose the injustice of the system. Jesus’ way of non-violence has been explored in more recent times by a diverse group of people that includes, Mohandus Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jnr, the women of Greenham Common. Nelson Mandela is another. At his inauguration as President of the new South Africa he said, “We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination.” Wink writes, “The way of non-violence, the way Jesus chose, is the only way that is able to overcome evil without creating new forms of evil and making us evil in turn.” The goal of non-violent direct action is to establish a political culture in which conflicts are managed without violence.

Christianity then was established on principles of non-violence, but over the centuries it has tended to frequently debate the merits of pacifism and just war responses. Sometimes it has put its principles of peace and justice to one side in order to conquer in the name of Christianity. Now is the time to reclaim our original values of peace with justice, achieved through non-violent action in the midst of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

The similarity between the three Abrahamic faiths in their embracing of the ideals of love, peace, justice and the way of non-violence is striking, and surely provides a way forward in attempts to resolve the present conflict.

The golden rule

Much of what is encompassed in the concepts of justice and peace is captured in the golden rule. Religious leaders of all traditions have used it in variant forms to summarise their ethical teachings. The golden rule is endorsed by all the world religions. In Judaism, Islam and the Christian traditions it takes these forms.

Judaism

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18)

“What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow humans. That is the entire law; all the rest is commentary.” (The Talmud)

Islam

“Not one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself.” (40 Hadith of an-Nawawi 13)

Christianity

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31)

The golden rule does not replace a range of ethical and social principles and is not an infallible guide by which actions can be judged right or wrong. It does not provide all the answers. What it does provide, says Harry J Gensler, an ethics scholar in the USA, is a consistency principle, a way of ensuring that our actions do not defy our desires. If we violate the golden rule then we violate the spirit of fairness and concern, he says, that lie at the heart of morality.

Gensler says that, “To apply the golden rule adequately, we need knowledge and imagination. We need to know what effect our actions have on the lives of others. And we need to be able to imagine ourselves, vividly and accurately, in the other person’s place on the receiving end of the action. With knowledge, imagination, and the golden rule, we can progress far in our moral thinking.” Gensler goes on to state, “The golden rule, with its roots in a wide range of world cultures, is well suited to be a standard to which different cultures could appeal in resolving conflicts.”

Conclusion

As we seek a religious or theological response to overcoming the Israel/Palestine conflict we need to look at what each of the three faith traditions caught up in the violence has to offer at this time. This will mean dealing with the worst in each of the traditions which fuels the conflict, as well as appealing to the best in each of the traditions which offers a way out of the violence: justice, peace, and the golden rule. There is a need to bring the three Abrahamic faith traditions together to this end. As Hans Kung reminds us, there can be “No peace among nations without peace among the religions, and no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.”

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Section twelve : The Promised Land? A moral critique of “chosen people – promised land” theology



Contributed by John H Roberts, Mission and Ecumenical Secretary, Methodist Church of New Zealand

‘It is to your descendants that I will give this land’

Genesis 12: 7

This material is drawn from the book “The Bible and Colonialism: a moral critique” by Michael Prior CM, and published in 1997 by Sheffield Academic Press. The author is Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at St Mary’s University College, University of Surrey, UK. The reader should consult the book itself for the detail of the author’s argument.

Critique of the Exodus story

Scripture enjoys a unique authority in both synagogue and church. For Jews the Torah must be accepted and obeyed in its totality. The Bible enjoys a similar authority in the church as the Word of God. However scripture often poses us with fundamental moral problems when taken at face value. This is particularly so with the occupation of the land of Canaan by the Israelites at the end of their exodus journey from Egypt.

In the biblical narrative the Hebrew slaves who left Egypt invaded a land already occupied. The occupation of other peoples land invariably involves systematic pillage and killing. “What distinguishes the biblical accounts of this activity is that it is presented as having not only divine approval, but as being mandated by the divinity. This presentation of a god who requires the destruction of others poses problems for anyone who presumes that the conduct of an ethical god will not fall lower than decent, secular behaviour. Prima facie, judged by the standards of ethics and human rights to which our society has become accustomed, the first six books of the Hebrew Bible reflect some ethnocentric, racist, xenophobic sentiments that appear to receive the highest possible legitimacy in the form of divine approval.”

A consistent reading of the Bible shows that the liberating God of the exodus becomes the oppressive God of the occupation of Canaan. However the dominant reading of the exodus story has been through Hebrew or Israelite eyes. Now the challenge is to read that same story through Canaanite eyes. “The real poor of the exodus narrative, surely are the ones forgotten in the victory, the Canaanites and others who are pushed aside or exterminated in the religious zeal of the invading Israelites with God on their side.” Indigenous peoples in many parts of the world have no doubt about the link between religion and oppression and reserve particular criticism for the bible. When Pope John Paul II visited Peru, the indigenous peoples asked him to take back the bible and give it to their oppressors. It is now evident that terrible injustice has been inflicted through the processes of colonialism and that biblical and theological discourse has encouraged this. One of the features of using the bible as legitimation for colonization and exploitation is the absence of any serious consideration for the victims of the process.

“A major problem with the promised land tradition in the Bible is its portrayal of God as what many in the modern world would regard as a racist, militaristic, xenophobe, whose views would not be tolerated in any modern democracy.” So every effort must be made to rescue the bible from being a blunt instrument in the oppression of one people by another. There is a need to challenge the kind of Biblicism that sees the core of biblical revelation to be frozen in the concepts of “chosen people” and “promised land”, when the application of these views can have such morally questionable outcomes.



The present conflict and biblical scholarship

“Discussion amongst biblical scholars and theologians on the subject of the settlement of the children of Israel in Canaan in antiquity, and of Jews in Palestine in modern times, is distinguished by its neglect of consideration for the inhabitants of the region prior to those occupations... And yet as Arnold Toynbee notes, it was the same, ‘biblically recorded conviction of the Israelites that God had instigated them to exterminate the Canaanites, that sanctioned the British conquest of North America, Ireland and Australia, the Dutch conquest of South Africa, the Prussian conquest of Poland and the Zionist conquest of Palestine.’”

Zionism is a political ideology that has much in common with 19th century European nationalism and colonialism. “In line with prevailing European racism which was predicated on the inferiority of all native peoples, Zionism determined to improve the lot of international Jewry at the expense of the indigenous population of Palestine... Much of the thrust in Zionism derives from a literalist interpretation of the biblical witness... with scant attention to the rights of the indigenes.” In some formulations of the Zionist victory it is said that the indigenes should appreciate their passive path to redemption via the Jewish homecoming. There is no shortage of utopian idealizations of the promise of God’s gift to the children of Israel.

The establishment of the Jewish state involved the eviction of the majority of the Palestinians, the destruction of most of their villages, and the continual use of force and state terrorism, wars and military operations. Today the Jewish religious establishment fully supports Zionism. “It is a matter of concern that religious Jews have little regard for the indigenes who have paid the price for the establishment of Israel. But neither did Joshua in the biblical narrative... Zionism has reduced the ideals of Judaism to those portions of its tradition that betray a narrow and exclusivist concept of a tribal god... as if it were the sole authentic expression of Judaism.”

However recent scholarship on Israel’s origins challenges many of the ‘givens’ of previous discourse. Literary and historical investigation has convinced virtually all scholars that the biblical narrative of the exodus and settlement of Canaan is not history, but part of a fabricated myth of origins in the process of nation building that followed the Babylonian exile. In this light it is unwise to conclude that that the occupation took place as described in the Book of Joshua.

“The biblical doctrines of God’s chosen people and a promised land become a problem when seen in the light of the colonial exploitation they give rise to, including militaristic and xenophobic Zionism which undermines the integrity of Judaism, embarrasses and shocks most moral people, and wreaks havoc on an innocent third party... Biblical scholarship must now set its own house in order by articulating ethical criteria by which dispositions unworthy of a civilized person may not be accorded a privileged place as part of a sacred text.”



**Left and above:
Palestinian Olive
Groves are
destroyed as Israel
constructs its
security fence, often
several kilometers
into Palestinian
territory.**

WCC-EAPPI/Sune

Conclusion and useful websites:



Conclusion:

The history, issues, theologies and personal testimonies covered in this backgrounder reveal how complex the situation is. There are no easy answers when two people with valid claims seek the same piece of land to secure their future and well-being. All we do know is that violence has failed the people of the region. The use of force will not bring about a resolution all parties can live with.

There are many issues to reflect on and the accompanying study questions can help you clarify your thoughts, hopes and action. It is an ongoing and evolving issue and we all pray that the latest peace plan will bring some relief and stability to the troubled region. The following websites will you keep up-to-date with events and the ongoing struggle for peace in Israel/Palestine.

The challenge for us in Aotearoa New Zealand is to listen to the different sides of the conflict, show compassion for all who suffer through it, and reflect on our new understanding of the situation. We need to stand with those who work for peace and look for ways to support a just and non-violent resolution. We can begin by promoting understanding and peace within our own communities rather than the culture of violence and retaliation that has set the Middle East on its downward spiral of conflict.

A selection of useful websites

Palestine National Authority

<http://www.pna.gov.ps/>

Israeli Government

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/home.asp>

United Nations

Question of Palestine:

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal/>

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees

<http://www.un.org/unrwa/>

News Services

BBC (UK)

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/middle_east/2001/israel_and_the_palestinians/

The Guardian (UK)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/0,2759,377264,00.html>

Haaretz (Israel)

<http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasen/pages/LiArt.jhtml?contrassID=1>

Christian organisations

World Council of Churches

<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/palestine/eap.html>

<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/palestine/israel-palestine.html>

Middle East Council of Churches

www.mecchurches.org

Sabeel: ecumenical centre for Palestinian Liberation Theology

www.sabeel.org

International Council of Christians and Jews

www.iccj.org

CAII Member Churches

Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia

www.anglican.org.nz

Methodist Church of New Zealand

www.methodist.org.nz

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

www.presbyterian.org.nz

The Salvation Army in New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga

www.salvationarmy.org.nz

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 **Presbyterian Church**
of Aotearoa New Zealand



**The Anglican Church in
Aotearoa, New Zealand
and Polynesia**



**The Salvation Army
in New Zealand, Fiji
and Tonga**



**The Methodist Church
of New Zealand**