



**PALESTINE ISRAEL
ECUMENICAL NETWORK**

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The Nightmare of the Al NAKBA

(15th May, 2020 - 72nd commemoration)

The Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network (PIEN) stands in solidarity with the Palestinian people to commemorate the 72nd anniversary of Al Nakba ('the Catastrophe' in Arabic). For Jewish people this date in 1948 marks the birth of the State of Israel. For Palestinians however, it serves as a reminder of the ethnic cleansing that occurred. From late 1947 through to March 1949 over 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled from historical Palestine at the hands of Zionist paramilitaries, along with 418 villages destroyed and an estimated 15,000 Palestinians killed. Approximately 150,000 Palestinians remained within the newly formed Israeli borders, with many of them being internally displaced. Today Palestinians living within Israel make up 20% of the population but suffer greatly from discriminatory laws, particularly so since the adoption in 2018 of the Nation State law, making Israel a state for Jewish citizens only.

Today over 5 million Palestinian refugees are registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and mostly live in surrounding Arab countries or are internally displaced within the Occupied Palestinian territories (West Bank and Gaza). In fact, 80% of the population of Gaza come from families who are refugees from historical Palestine. Israel has repeatedly denied refugees their right of return, which is a human right according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

From the late 19th century the Zionist mandate has always been the creation of a Jewish state which sees control of the majority amount of land with the minimum number of Palestinians on it. This goal of oppression and dispossession continues to this day so in a sense the Nakba has never ended.

At the end of the first Arab/Israel war in 1949, Israel had claimed 77% of the land, which included West Jerusalem. In the six-day war in 1967 Israel seized power over all of Palestine and has maintained a crippling inhumane military control over the Occupied Palestinian territories for the past 53 years.

After the six-day War, the UN Resolution 242 was passed citing the illegality of the occupation and called on Israel to withdraw. Many more such resolutions have been passed but with allies such as the USA, the state of Israel continues to meter out harsh and unjust treatment to Palestinians. Under International Law, an occupying power's primary responsibility is to provide for the needs and welfare of the occupied population, however Palestinians continue to live under constant abuse of their fundamental human rights. The state of Israel blatantly disregards International Laws by:

- Constructing the Separation Barrier on Palestinian land, rather than on the Green Line recognized border
- Denying Palestinians access to education and to their own land and hence livelihood
- Establishing Israeli Settlements on Palestinian land, often these are built on the most fertile land and over water catchments, denying Palestinians access to these natural resources

Australian Christians who seek lasting peace for the people of Palestine and Israel.

We aim to equip and inform Australian churches, inspired by Christ's vision for universal reconciliation.

- By the demolition of private property. This is forbidden outside of ongoing military operations. Often property is demolished and olive trees uprooted to build the Separation Barrier and illegal Settlements
- Through the confiscation of land (for building the Wall, Settlements, roads for Settlers, to control nature reserves).
- Using collective punishment such as putting villages on curfew and lockdown
- Detaining and interrogating children. Children as young as 12 years of age are being detained by Israel. They are often questioned without adult supervision and forced to signed statements written in Hebrew which they cannot read. Children are sometimes held for years without being charged until they turn 18 and then they are sentenced as adults
- The use of Administrative detention whereby people are held indefinitely on secret information without being charged or allowed to stand trial or having access to the information even through a lawyer
- By transporting Palestinian political prisoners to prisons within Israel
- The 13 year land, sea and air siege on Gaza. The UN has declared that it will become unliveable this year. On average they have 4 hours of electricity a day, 90% of Gaza's water is undrinkable, 80% of Gazans rely on food aid and the overall unemployment rate is 32% with youth unemployment at 57%. The result is economic, social, psychological, cultural, and political devastation. Reports from international agencies reveal how Israel's blockade is not just a policy of collective punishment, but also a policy of de-developing Gaza.

With the newly formed Netanyahu-Gantz coalition government in Israel, there is grave danger that as soon as 1st July 2020, plans for formal annexation of large sections of the West Bank will begin, in line with the US 'Deal of the Century' proposal. Leaving little possibility for a just peace to be obtained in the Holy Land and making it virtually impossible for Palestinians to form a viable state.

Prior to the State of Israel in 1948, Palestinian Christians numbered around 10% of the population. Today they make up less than 2%, with those remaining fearing that the indigenous Christian presence in the land of its birth may one day cease. Christians are leaving the Holy Land mainly to escape the oppressive rule by Israel.

We have heard the call and plea from our sisters and brothers in Christ from the Kairos Palestine movement crying out for our solidarity, our earnest prayers and our commitment to take action, stand up and speak out to insist on a just peace.

From our friends at Sabeel we conclude with this prayer:

"Lord, you are our stronghold and our rock of refuge. We pray to you as we witness ongoing actions to annex land belonging to Palestinians. We pray that, even now, those who would 'frame injustice by statute' (Psalm 94:20) would turn around and seek peace and abide by international law. Lord, in your mercy... Hear our prayer."