

Call to action

We join the Christians and the members of the Churches in the UK and Sweden in the following statement:

We are currently witnessing an escalation in violence in Palestine and Israel that has brought death, injury, destruction and havoc to the lives of thousands of innocent people living there. We strongly condemn the use of violence and military force against civilians on all sides and mourn with those that have lost loved ones. The atrocities committed by Hamas militants inside Israel – the killing, maiming, and kidnapping of civilians rightly invokes outrage and condemnation. Israel's military violence against civilians in Gaza, including the destruction of residential buildings that has wiped out whole families, and now the cutting off of water, food, electricity and fuel which constitutes collective punishment require equal condemnation. Today the Israeli military has ordered 1.1 million Palestinians in the Northern Gaza strip to evacuate to the South. There is nowhere for them to go. The UN has said that this will be “impossible without devastating humanitarian consequences”.

Both parties have potentially committed war crimes/crimes against humanity and should be held to account for their actions. Ultimately violence will only beget more violence and will not address the root cause of the problem or seek to find solutions and ways forward based on justice, equality, and peace.

The events of the last few days have not happened in silo. For 75 years the Palestinian people have suffered oppression, domination, displacement, dispossession, and denial of their basic rights. 56 of those years have been endured under military occupation, with every aspect of their lives controlled by Israel. In Gaza, the last 16 years have seen the imposition of a brutal blockade which has devastated the economy, caused unimaginable suffering for the people of Gaza, and wrought environmental destruction on the land.

In 2012 the United Nations warned the world that Gaza would be unliveable in 2020. We are now 3 years past that, and there has been no meaningful international pressure on Israel to lift its inhumane blockade. 80% of the population rely on aid to survive, 50% are children, only 2% of the population are estimated to be affiliated with military groups. International law is clear – collective punishment of a population, held as responsible for the actions of Hamas, is illegal.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, Israel continues to steal land, property, and natural resources from Palestinians, increasing the number of settlements and settler outposts, and the settlers that live in them. The election of far-right members to the Israeli Knesset earlier this year has emboldened those settlers to the point that violence and attacks on Palestinians, their property, and their lands has increased three-fold. Before this latest escalation over 200 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank this year so far – the deadliest year on record since 2005.

The occupation is illegal, both in its unprecedented length and permanency, and in how it is imposed. But recent analysis by leading human rights organisations has moved us beyond occupation to the conclusion that Israel is guilty of the crime of apartheid against Palestinians both inside the Palestinian territories, and even within their own state.

Considering the above, where is the international community in all of this? There has been deafening silence and complicity in allowing this to carry on for 75 years. The UK Government has been hiding behind the sham of supporting a two-state solution, long acknowledged by many in Palestine and Israel as dead in the water. They have allowed impunity to continue for decades, failing to support international mechanisms of accountability. In the last few days, they have expressed unwavering support for Israel, offering diplomatic, intelligence and security support. They have failed to publicly apply any pressure on Israel to comply with international humanitarian law and protect civilians in Gaza.

A Call to Action

Now we call for the following actions to take place:

- To the Government – Insist on the immediate protection of civilians, to prevent further atrocities taking place. Insist on the upholding of International Humanitarian Law by all sides, and support mechanisms such as investigations by the ICC and ICJ [1] hold to account those that have committed crimes. In the longer term, cut military ties and trade with Israel until Israel complies with international law and ends its illegal occupation, blockade, and apartheid policies.
- To the Churches – we call on you to speak truth to power, as written in scripture. We call on you to fulfil your mission as the Church in standing on the side of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the poor and those without voice. We ask you to take actions to ensure that you do not support, either financially or spiritually, the continuing oppression of the Palestinian people. We ask you to respond to the call of Palestinian Christians – ‘Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love?’ [2]
- To Civil Society – We call on you to immediately write to your MPs to demand that the government upholds international humanitarian law and calls for the protection of civilians in Gaza. We ask you to support non-violent actions that can bring about economic, cultural, and social pressure on Israel to end its 75-year long denial of Palestinian rights. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions [3] are the only response now to an entrenched apartheid regime, as history has taught us.
- To all of the above – We call on you to use your influence, relationships, and good offices to help bring about a meaningful process by which this endless cycle of violence is halted, and justice, equality and peace are placed at the centre for all those whose lives are affected.

In humility,

Vita Andreasen
Uffe Gjerding
Betlehems Venner