



## Statement for the 2019 World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel “Humanity and Equality in God’s Creation”

On the occasion of the 2019 [World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel](#) (15-22 September), sponsored by the World Council of Churches, Pax Christi International joins the call for all to acknowledge and defend humanity and equality in God’s creation. Fundamental to our faith, and that of our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters, is the core belief that all persons are created by God. As children of a gracious and loving Creator, our humanity and equality are unassailable. These principles, in the secular realm, form the basis of international law and are enshrined in the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). They are the bedrock of a just, humane and free society.

For those whose lives and futures are affected daily by the realities in Israel-Palestine, the call for humanity and equality could not be more urgent. The ongoing conflict in Israel-Palestine has created victims from all communities. Both Israelis and Palestinians have suffered at the hands of each other and both are responsible for egregious acts that have harmed innocent people. Our peace movement denounces all acts of violence and believes that all those who promote acts of aggression must be held accountable. We support all organisations in Israel and Palestine that are seeking nonviolent solutions to this conflict.

The cycle of violence and revenge has fueled a virulent dehumanisation by some toward the other. It has created a toxic environment that demeans the basic humanity of some and elevates the inherent value of others. It is, at its core, the most dangerous threat undermining hopes for a just and sustainable peace. For Palestinians, whether they live in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) including East Jerusalem, as fourth-generation refugees in United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) camps or in the diaspora, their basic human rights and freedoms are too often violated and their humanity made elusive.

In Israel, Palestinian Arab Israeli citizens constitute approximately 21% of the population.<sup>1</sup> Our peace movement is deeply concerned by the passage and enforcement of more than sixty-five Israeli laws that either explicitly discriminate or have in their implementation a significantly more disparate impact on Palestinian Arab Israeli citizens. Among these laws are:

- The **Absentee Property Law** which was passed in 1950, two years after some 750,000 Palestinians left or were forced to flee their homes in the wake of the creation of the State of Israel. This law, which does not apply to the its Jewish citizens, gives the State authority to expropriate any “abandoned” properties or land. A 2010 amendment confirmed the State’s ownership of what is confiscated under that law. Records show that 96% of the Jewish communities established between 1948-1953 were built on absentee property. Today, Palestinian Arab citizens own only 3.5% of the land within Israel’s borders.<sup>2</sup>
- The **Law of Return** also passed in 1950 and amended in 1970 allows any person who has at least one Jewish grandparent to immigrate to Israel and automatically become an Israeli citizen. The

<sup>1</sup> Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019 population statistics, <https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/subjects/Pages/Population.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> The Mossawa Center, *Israel and Its Arab Palestinian Citizens*, 2017, p.4, <http://www.mossawa.org/eng/Public/file/OIsrael%20and%20its%20Arab%20Palestinian%20Citizens%20-%2024%20May%202017.pdf>.

law also grants this right of citizenship to their children and grandchildren as well as their spouses. No comparable law exists to guarantee the rights of any Palestinian to immigrate and receive citizenship, even those who were born in the land that is now the State of Israel. Palestinians are unable to return to the West Bank, East Jerusalem or Gaza sometimes even to visit. The absence of such a guarantee denies Palestinians a right of return mandated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 13), of which Israel is a signatory, and by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.

- The **Protection of Holy Sites** enacted in 1967 empowers the Ministry of Religious Affairs to designate the names of holy sites of in Israel. The Ministry has declared 135 Jewish locations as holy sites. To date, not one Christian, Muslim, or Druze holy place has been given such a designation.<sup>3</sup>
- The **National Entry into Israel Law** (also known as the “Citizenship and Family Unification Law”) was passed in 2003 as a temporary security measure and has been renewed every year since then. The law denies citizenship and residency status to the spouse of an Israeli citizen who comes from the OPT, Gaza or any country deemed an “enemy”. This law disproportionately impacts Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel as they are the ones most likely to have spouses living in the OPT, Gaza, refugee camps in Lebanon or Syria, or in the diaspora.
- The **Jewish National-State Law** passed in July 2018 explicitly identifies the State of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people securing the ethnic-religious character of Israel as exclusively Jewish. It tasks the State to “preserve the cultural, historical and religious heritage of the Jewish people in the diaspora.” It also requires “the development of Jewish settlements as a national value.”<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, it has been estimated that since 1948 Israel has built “close to 1,100 Jewish settlements between the Jordan and Mediterranean Sea. At the same time, it destroyed over 400 villages and forbade Arabs to build new locations.”<sup>5</sup> The only exception to this are the few enclaves that the State created – on Bedouin land – in which to concentrate forcibly displaced Bedouin communities. In addition, many Palestinian villages and communities that pre-date the establishment of the State of Israel but lie within its borders remain unrecognised by the State and are therefore not provided any basic government services such as electricity, water, sewage or roads.

While Israeli Jewish citizens enjoy a robust building boom, Palestinian Arab citizens are routinely denied building permits. Any construction built without a permit may be demolished. Over 50,000 Palestinian families live in homes under threat of demolition.<sup>6</sup> Recent legislation has significantly increased enforcement of demolition orders and the severity of fines.

For Palestinians living in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, the assault on their humanity and human rights is constant and pernicious. For more than a half-century, men, women and children in the OPT have lived under a military occupation. Under international law, Israel, as the occupying power,

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<sup>3</sup> See the website of the Israeli Ministry of Religious Services:

[https://www.gov.il/he/Departments/ministry\\_of\\_religious\\_services](https://www.gov.il/he/Departments/ministry_of_religious_services).

<sup>4</sup> The Mossawa Center, *Israel and Its Arab Palestinian Citizens*, 2017, p.12,

<http://www.mossawa.org/eng/Public/file/0Israel%20and%20its%20Arab%20Palestinian%20Citizens%20-%2024%20May%202017.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Oren Yiftachel, *Studying Naqab/Negev Bedouins—Toward a colonial paradigm?*, HAGAR Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities Vol.8 (2), 2008, page 6,

[http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/Yiftachel/new\\_papers\\_2009/yiftachel%20hagar%202008.pdf](http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/Yiftachel/new_papers_2009/yiftachel%20hagar%202008.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> The Mossawa Center, *Israel and Its Arab Palestinian Citizens*, 2017, p.11,

<http://www.mossawa.org/eng/Public/file/0Israel%20and%20its%20Arab%20Palestinian%20Citizens%20-%2024%20May%202017.pdf>.

is responsible for protecting the Palestinian population under its control and providing for their welfare and well-being. It is also incumbent on Israel to respect, protect and enable the full exercise of this population's human rights.<sup>7</sup> Yet during these intervening years, nothing less than an aberration of these responsibilities has been the reality:

- Palestinians have watched their right to self-determination being denied with the approval of every new Israeli settlement – all illegal under international law. As of 2018, an estimated 628,000 Jewish Israeli citizens had moved into settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem with Israel providing security, administrative services, housing, transportation, education, and medical care for them.<sup>8</sup> Settlement expansion often comes at the expense of Palestinian suffering and humiliation. For example, on one day in 2018, Israel destroyed – to expand or build a new illegal settlement – three water systems, six homes, eight livelihood structures and four solar panel systems. Eleven of those structures had been funded by the EU.<sup>9</sup>
- Freedom of movement provides access to employment, education, medical care, religious observance, and the ability to gather with family and friends. For too many Palestinians, freedom of movement remains an elusive right. International travel or a simple trip of a few miles demands an Israeli permit which is often denied or endlessly delayed. Military checkpoints, roadblocks and the imposing Separation Barrier (which isolates 11,000 Palestinians on its western side<sup>10</sup>) inflict enormous hardship on Palestinians and are an assault on their dignity and rights as “free” human beings.
- Palestinians are subjected to Israeli military law and judicial system, which has a near-100% conviction rate; whereas, Israeli civil law and court proceedings are applied to Jewish residents living in the settlements. Palestinian children are regularly denied many of the customary protections afforded Israeli minors. They are traumatised by nighttime raids and arrests, interrogations without a guardian or counsel, and documented abusive physical and mental treatment. The military court system mocks their rights to fair and equitable treatment as civilians and juveniles. On average, 500-700 Palestinian children (ages 12-17) are detained and prosecuted every year.<sup>11</sup>
- Palestinian requests for building permits are rarely if ever granted. Thus, any necessary renovation or expansion of a home, farming or animal structure, digging of a well, etc. can be considered illegal and subject to demolition. This extends to schools and other municipal buildings. Today, 6152 structures have been demolished, 9519 men, women and children have been displaced, and another hundred-thousand-plus people have been negatively affected. There are some 13,000 pending Israeli demolition orders, including 40 against schools, leaving thousands of Palestinians living under the looming threat of homelessness.<sup>12</sup>
- Livelihoods are rendered obsolete by the destruction of fields and the uprooting of fruit and ancient olive trees by Israeli bulldozers and at the hands of settlers. Not only does this create grave economic hardship, it tears at the very fabric of generations of family histories and deeply

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (ECHO), *Occupied Palestinian Territories; Humanitarian Facts and Figures*, 2017, p.1, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-facts-and-figures>.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Israel and Palestine: events of 2018*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/israel/palestine>.

<sup>9</sup> See the website of the Alliance for Water Justice in Palestine: [www.waterjusticepalestine.org](http://www.waterjusticepalestine.org).

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Israel and Palestine: events of 2018*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/israel/palestine>.

<sup>11</sup> See this website of Defence for Children International – Palestine: [https://www.dci-palestine.org/issues\\_military\\_detention](https://www.dci-palestine.org/issues_military_detention).

<sup>12</sup> Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU), *Palestine: 2018 in Review*, <https://imeu.org/article/palestine-2018-in-review>.

held ties to the land of their ancestors. Since 1967, over 2.5 million trees and saplings have been uprooted or damaged.<sup>13</sup>

- Fair allocation of resources, especially water, is critical to every population and affects all aspects of daily life. In the West Bank virtually all of the territory's water resources, fertile grazing pastures and agricultural land, and areas for mining and mineral extraction are in Area C which comprises 60% of the West Bank and is under full Israeli control. The Palestinian population has little to no access to these resources. Only 50.9% of Palestinian households have access to water. Israel, who controls over 80% of the water, forbids Palestinians from taking water from rivers, streams, creeks, lakes and reservoirs; nor does it allow the collection of runoff water in dams. Settlers utilise more than six times the amount of water than the over three million Palestinians who must rely on captured rainwater in cisterns or water purchased from Israel at exorbitant prices.<sup>14</sup>

For twelve years, Gaza has been collectively punished by Israel's devastating land, air and sea blockade bringing this tiny enclave of 365 sq. kilometers (141 sq. miles) and 2 million people to the brink of an inhumane existence:

- Four Israeli military operations (2004, 2008-9, 2012, 2014) and on-going incursions as well as intra-fighting among Palestinian rivals and factions have killed and maimed thousands of civilians. They have destroyed or so significantly damaged Gaza's infrastructure that the electric, water, desalination and sewage plants are virtually non-functional, severely compromising all dimensions of Gazan society. 97% of Gaza's population (991,400 children) do not have access to clean drinking water as 97% of it is contaminated. Infant mortality rates have increased and a quarter of the diseases diagnosed in Gaza have been deemed a result of the lack of clean water. Sewage flows through neighbourhoods into the sea which is now 73% polluted.<sup>15</sup> Yet Israel is referred to as a "global leader in innovative and breakthrough technologies to manage scarce water resources."
- Affecting all aspects of daily life for every Gazan is the severe shortage of electricity and fuel which are essential for everything: powering water pumps and desalination plants, keeping the lights and machines working in a hospital or school, or simply running a refrigerator at home. In 2019, Gazans had access to electricity anywhere from 9-15 hours a day.<sup>16</sup> Most recently, Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered the military to cut fuel transfers to Gaza in half, further exacerbating an already dangerous situation.<sup>17</sup>
- Israel maintains strict control over all materials and goods that enter Gaza. This has led to severe shortages of necessary items needed to repair and rebuild the infrastructure, homes, schools, and hospitals damaged or destroyed by the fighting. These restrictions drastically impede the ability of hospitals and businesses to function, even minimally. At the same time, Israel also dictates what products and produce can leave Gaza – where it can be sold and when. This has systematically undermined any economic security or growth for Gazans.

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<sup>13</sup> See the website of the Alliance for Water Justice in Palestine: [www.waterjusticepalestine.org](http://www.waterjusticepalestine.org).

<sup>14</sup> Idem

<sup>15</sup> Idem

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Improvements to Gaza electricity supply: New gridlines and sustainable power solutions enhance hospital services*, 16 July 2019, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/improvements-gaza-electricity-supply>.

<sup>17</sup> Washington Post, *Israel PM cuts Gaza fuel transfers amid flurry of threats*, 26 August 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/israel-cuts-gaza-fuel-transfers-in-half-after-rocket-attack/2019/08/26/0e259ac4-c7d3-11e9-9615-8f1a32962e04\\_story.html?noredirect=on](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/israel-cuts-gaza-fuel-transfers-in-half-after-rocket-attack/2019/08/26/0e259ac4-c7d3-11e9-9615-8f1a32962e04_story.html?noredirect=on).

- Gazans with life-threatening illnesses and diseases who require urgent or ongoing care (e.g. cancer and dialysis treatment) are relegated to relying on Israel's permission to travel. Permits are often denied or delayed leaving vulnerable patients helpless and hopeless. For those Gazans who need regular medical care, the situation is dire. As of July 2019, 49% of essential drugs were at zero stock level (less than a month of stock).<sup>18</sup>
- Students, young artists and entrepreneurs have little to no opportunity to pursue their passions or lifelong dreams, dimming their hopes for a better future. A generation of vibrant, capable human beings are being disenfranchised of their right for "fullness of life" (John 10:10).
- In 2000, Gaza had 10,000 fishermen. Today, only one-third are still working as such and 95% of them live under the poverty line. Israel determines the fishing perimeters, which are expanded and contracted constantly, making an accurate determination of where it is safe to fish extremely difficult. Fishermen are subjected to live fire from Israeli soldiers and have often had their boats seized only to be returned damaged or without their engines and nets.<sup>19</sup>
- As in the OPT, representatives from the United Nations and human rights organisations, journalists and others are often denied entry to Gaza, limiting proper oversight and transparency of the ways in which Palestinian lives are being affected by Israel's actions and policies.

All of these realities expose the many (but far from only) ways in which the humanity and rights of Palestinians are denied. Therefore, we must ask ourselves that if we embrace the belief that all humans are created by God as equals ("For God shows no partiality" Romans 2:11) and that all persons deserve to live in fullness with dignity and equal rights, must we not raise our collective voices to demand that Palestinians and Israelis share equally in these inalienable gifts from God? Pax Christi International strongly affirms its commitment to advocate for a just and sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which recognises, affirms and protects the human dignity of every woman, man and child. We call on the international community to assert its influence and push for a renewed peace process based on respect and protection of human rights.

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Gaza strip: early warning indicators*, July 2019, [https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/early\\_warning\\_indicator\\_july\\_2019.pdf](https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/early_warning_indicator_july_2019.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> See the website of the Alliance for Water Justice in Palestine: [www.waterjusticepalestine.org](http://www.waterjusticepalestine.org).