



Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee

WATCHING BRIEF 20-12: THE FUTURE OF PALESTINE

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government, we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

December 2020

This Brief looks at the trends affecting Palestine and particularly the two-state solution that has long been advocated.

Background

The Trump Administration in January 2020 put forward a 'Middle East Plan' to resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict. This followed an earlier plan in June 2019 that concentrated on economic aspects. No Palestinians were involved in the negotiations that led to the plan, and it was widely seen as biased towards Israel. The plan rejected a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and required few concessions from Israel in relation to the annexation of land. The Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made it clear that Israel would annex the Jordan Valley and West Bank's settlement while committing not to create new settlements.

The General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific said in a media release on 20 October 2020 that, despite promises to postpone annexation of significant parts of the West Bank, Israel had approved the construction of thousands of housing units in its illegal settlements. The Delegation also drew attention to the Australian Government's decision to cut funding to UNRWA (which works with Palestinian refugees) from \$20m in 2019-20 to \$10m in 2020-21, and called for the funds to be reinstated.

The Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN) on 20 January 2020 condemned the Trump plan as limiting Palestinian sovereignty and denying refugees their basic rights. Its president Bishop George Browning said that the only solution was full equality and justice.

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Agreements between Israel and Two Arab States

Israel's longstanding attempts to develop ties with the Arab world have led to accords between Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, brokered by the United States. Part of the agreement with UAE was for Israel to suspend the annexation of West Bank territory. It represents a significant shift in relations in the Middle East. The 2002 Arab Peace Initiative declared that Israel would only receive normal ties in return for a statehood deal with the Palestinians and an end to the Occupation. Saudi Arabia and Oman have declined to join the new arrangement.

This move has been welcomed in many official quarters, including by the Australian Government. Foreign Minister Senator Marise Payne said in a media release on 15 September 2020 that Australia saw the step as part of a 'normalisation' that will "pave the way for enduring peace, and greater dialogue, cooperation, and economic opportunities". At the same time, the Minister affirmed the continuing commitment of Australia to a two-state solution to the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel. On the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) it is stated that Australia (December 2018) recognised West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and looks forward to moving its embassy there as part of a two-state solution.

On the other hand, Jordan's prime minister Omar Razzaz expressed concern that 'looking the other way' in relation to the Palestinians would 'come to haunt us' in future. Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said Turkey would never accept the move and accused the Gulf nations of betraying the Palestinian cause.

Palestinian Responses

The Guardian (22 September 2020) recorded several responses from Palestinian representatives. The Palestinian ambassador to the UK, Husam Zomlot, said that Israel was unlikely to make any moves to end the occupation given that UAE and Bahrain have rewarded it for doing nothing about it. Shadi Abu Samra, a social worker, said the deal was an extension of Israel's links with the Gulf states. Dalia Karazom, a teacher, saw the deal as a way for the Gulf states to build a front against Iran and to appease US President Trump.

In Al Jazeera (15 Sept 2020) Ammar Hijari, assistant minister of multilateral affairs for the Palestinian Authority, said it was a sad day. "The only path for peace for the Palestinians is ending this brutal Israeli occupation and granting Palestinians their inalienable rights of self-determination".

Where to from Here?

The vision of a two-state solution is increasingly dimming, as more and more decisions are made by Israel to divide up the West Bank. At the recent AGM of APAN, Bishop George Browning summed up the situation as follows:

- APAN is now almost ten years old and is continuing to expand in members and resources. There are more volunteers who are getting engaged. Yet the plight of the Palestinians is worse, despite APAN's advocacy and efforts to support them.

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- The Occupation has become an ‘accepted reality’, and agreements between a few Arab states and Israel have undermined Palestinian voices and capacity to contribute to decisions. The idea of a separate state is fading, and the continuance of one state involves ‘apartheid’.
- The Australian Government is not willing to challenge any of these developments, and is deaf to alternative approaches.
- APAN could change its focus to (a) advocating for Palestinians to be seen and heard, (b) upholding international law and human rights, (c) building links between Palestinians and Aboriginal people, (d) challenging politicians who claim there is equal power on both ‘sides’ of the situation, (e) seeking partners in the Jewish community who are disturbed about Israel’s actions, and (f) resisting statements that describe critics of Israel as ‘anti-Semitic’.

In the discussion that followed, there were additional thoughts shared:

- The ALP has a draft policy platform that omits a policy on Palestine – there is scope for persuading ALP members to correct this.
- The change of focus to a ‘one state’ reality involves reviewing fundamental principles of hope and peace.
- Palestinians appreciate APAN’s support, and view with scepticism the legitimacy of ‘deals’ between Israel and neighbouring states, as these have no support from Palestinians.

Quaker Responses

Friends in Ramallah have been weighed down with the ongoing struggle. A recent conversation with Saleem Zaru, Clerk of the Friends Meeting there, has indicated a sense of apprehension about the future, and an encouragement for ongoing links with Friends elsewhere. Ronis Chapman (secretary-Asia-West Pacific Section of FWCC) is willing to arrange periodic links on-line for those Friends interested.

Quakers can get involved through:

- contributing to the work of APAN through supporting their program of activities (which includes hosting tours to the region, and lobbying MPs in Australia).
- letting your Federal MPs and Senators know of your concern that Australia, by ignoring the Palestinians’ voices in its current policies, is undermining the chances of a sustainable resolution of the Israel –Palestine conflict. The list of members of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade can be found at the following website:

www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade_Committee_Membership

Canberra
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