

QUAKER PEACE AND LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – WATCHING BRIEF

This Brief follows the earlier ones (especially 20-12) which outlined the history of the region and the conflicts over the future of Palestine. A recent discussion between APAN and QPLC has raised a number of issues relevant to Quakers. Suggested actions are included in this Brief.

Recent Developments

The Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), of which Australian Quakers are members, highlighted in its approach to candidates during the federal election campaign the following suggested action:

- Advocate that Australia should join 138 other countries and formally recognise Palestine, giving them diplomatic equality with other nations.
- Speak out against Israeli human rights abuses, including the expansion of settlements on stolen land, the blockade of Gaza, and traumatic treatment of Palestinian children by the Israeli military.
- If travelling in the region, spend as much time in Palestine as in Israel.
- Commit to participating in the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine group.

APAN issued a media release on 14 April 2022 pointing out that the Australian government is out of touch with bulk of the Australian public. A recent national *YouGov* poll (commissioned by APAN and Australian Friends of Palestine) found that a majority believe Palestine should be recognised as an independent state, and oppose the current approach of the government towards the occupied territories, and the siege on Gaza. The president of APAN, Bishop George Browning, said that “it’s also clear these opinions cross political affiliations, with the majority of Labor (62%), Coalition (54%) and Greens (79%) voters believing the Australian Government should call on Israel to end its apartheid, or work with international human rights groups for a solution”. See <https://au.yougov.com/results/apc>

The International Criminal Court (ICC) in March 2021 began an investigation into war crimes in the Occupied Territories, especially the excess of violence exercised by the Israeli Defence Forces and the intensive settlement policies of the Israeli government. As yet the Israeli government has not responded to the allegations. Reporting for *Human Rights Pulse* at the time, Laura Sanzarella drew attention to the 1500 Palestinians killed and 6000 injuries during the Gaza War, and the destruction of hospitals and infrastructure and many houses by Israeli airstrikes. She also noted that the ICC would look into the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas into Israeli communities. Despite opposition from Israel and the USA, the ICC sees the purpose of the investigation as removing the sense of impunity amidst Israeli troops, and to bring some accountability for the serious violence in the region.

The Israeli High Court ruled in early May 2022 that about 1000 Palestinians can be evicted from an area of the West Bank and the land re-purposed for Israeli military use. A report in *The Guardian* (5 May) by Bethan McKernan said that 18% of West Bank land has been declared ‘firing zones’ for military training since the 1970s. Palestinian communities have been repeatedly threatened with home demolitions and harassed by nearby illegal Israeli settlers. An Israeli NGO called Breaking the Silence said that the high court “has greenlighted the largest population transfer in the history of the Occupation”.

The killing of the Palestinian journalist Shirin Abu Akleh on 11 May 2022 while covering an Israeli military raid in Jenin (northern occupied West Bank), and the violence at the funeral, have also raised tension considerably. Police said mourners were disrupting public order and attacked them. Amnesty International, in a media release on 12 May, said “Israel must end unlawful killings, wilful

injury, arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, persecution and collective punishment against Palestinians, including many children". The statement included the following details:

- Since the new Prime Minister Naftali Bennett took office in June 2021, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNCHA) says Israeli forces killed at least 79 Palestinians, including 14 children.
- Senior Israeli politicians have made repeated statements that incite violence and encourage the use of unlawful force against Palestinians who pose no imminent threat.
- Amnesty has conducted field observations, interviews with witnesses, and collected much information about the patterns of arbitrary treatment, including the killing of children.
- During Ramadan (3 April-8 May) Israeli authorities restricted access for Muslim worshippers to the al-Aqsa mosque in East Jerusalem, and police attacked worshippers.
- Separate attacks since March by armed Palestinians killed 18 people in cities across Israel, and on 7 April three people were killed (and other injured) in an attack on a restaurant in Tel Aviv by a Palestinian refugee.

In October 2021, six prominent Palestinian human rights and advocacy groups were outlawed by the Israeli government as 'terrorist' organisations. If you would like to sign a petition to the Australian Government about this, see www.apan.org.au/take-action/

Martin Bishara (*Al Jazeera*, 20 May 2020) reported on the Palestinian view that *apartheid* came to Israel with the 1994 Oslo II Agreement under which the occupied territories became 'bantustans' - similar to what happened in South Africa. He identified the importance of a new approach by Palestinians to focus on justice and freedom, and to work with supporters within the Jewish community and internationally to develop a unified movement for change.

The United Nations Human Rights Council has received a report from the special commission it appointed on Palestine. A media statement is appended, and the first paragraph reads as follows:

GENEVA (7 June 2022) - The continued occupation by Israel of Palestinian territory and discrimination against Palestinians are the key root causes of the recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict in the region, according to the first [report](#) by the new United Nations Independent International [Commission of Inquiry](#) on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, issued today.

Quaker Perspectives

The Clerk of Ramallah Friends Meeting, Saleem Zaru, has maintained contact with Quakers around the world during recent years. The Ramallah Meeting has "continued to play a critical role in supporting those working for peace and justice in the region, expanding the conception of peace and justice work to one that includes a ministry of presence and a space for nurturing and connecting visitors engaged in short- or long-term peace and justice activities". For further details see www.rfmq.org

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has worked since 1948 in Israel and Palestine towards a just and lasting peace, challenging the militarisation of Israeli society and the fragmentation of Palestinian identity. It has drawn attention to systematic inequality between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis, which has grown in recent years. One result has been the increasing use of the word 'apartheid' to describe the situation. Israeli human rights organisations *Yesh Din* and *B'tselem* have concluded that this is legally the case. AFSC has come to use the term 'apartheid' as a description of the reality, while being committed to justice and peace for all people of the region. It is also a reason why AFSC supports the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against links with the occupied territories. See www.afsc.org

British Quakers have taken several steps – in 2014 they called on the UK government to recognise Palestine as a nation state on the same basis as it recognises Israel. They asked that, as part of this step, the UK halt arms exports to Israel. In 2018 they became the first church in the UK to announce it would not invest any of its centrally-held funds in companies profiting from the occupation of Palestine. See www.quaker.org.uk

A number of Australian Quakers have been engaged in connections with Israel/Palestine, including through peace teams and accompaniment programs. There is still scope for taking up such opportunities.

QPLC has issued a number of *Watching Briefs* over the years (e.g. 17-3, 19-4, 20-12) about the Israel-Palestine conflict, and encouraged Friends to consider options such as the BDS campaign to disengage with the occupied settlements policy. Friends might also link with APAN in public events they initiate. QPLC will follow up the concerns raised by APAN about recognition for Palestine, and the investigation by the ICC of human rights abuses.

Suggested Action

- Advocate with MPs and Senators that Australia should formally recognise Palestine, giving them diplomatic equality with other nations.
- Speak out against Israeli human rights abuses, including the expansion of settlements on stolen land, the blockade of Gaza, and traumatic treatment of Palestinian children by the Israeli military.
- Encourage the Australian government to support the six human rights NGOs who have been outlawed by Israel.
- Explore the apartheid related issues in response to the inequitable approaches to the Palestinians and the Israelis.
- Support public events arranged by APAN- see www.apan.org.au
- Make known the various 'peace teams' and accompaniment programs available for those wishing to spend time in the region.

Canberra
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Appendix: Report: ending the continued Israeli occupation and discrimination against Palestinians is essential to stopping the conflict and halting the persistent cycle of violence, while a 'culture of impunity' feeds resentment and fuels recurrent tensions, instability, and protraction of conflict

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The Commission also noted that impunity is feeding increased resentment among the Palestinian people. It identified forced displacement, threats of forced displacement, demolitions, settlement construction and expansion, settler violence, and the blockade of Gaza as contributing factors to recurring cycles of violence. "The findings and recommendations relevant to the underlying root causes were overwhelmingly directed towards Israel, which we have taken as an indicator of the asymmetrical nature of the conflict and the reality of one State occupying the other," Navanethem Pillay, chair of the Commission, said.

The Commission released its 18-page report after conducting an assessment of recommendations made by previous Commissions of Inquiry and Fact-Finding Missions, as well as other United Nations

mechanisms and its own hearings. The Commission undertook two missions to Geneva and one to Jordan, and held consultations with various stakeholders, including Israeli and Palestinian civil society organizations.

“We also found that these recommendations have overwhelmingly not been implemented, including calls to ensure accountability for Israel’s violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and the indiscriminate firing of rockets fire by Palestinian armed groups into Israel. It is this lack of implementation coupled with a sense of impunity, clear evidence that Israel has no intention of ending the occupation, and the persistent discrimination against Palestinians that lies at the heart of the systematic recurrence of violations in both the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel,” Ms. Pillay added.

In its report, the Commission focused on the findings and recommendations directly related to underlying root causes of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict. In its assessment, key recommendations have not been implemented and this lies at the heart of the conflict. The Commission identified several overarching issues that lay at the core of most recommendations, including Israel’s failure to uphold the laws and customs of war, including those of belligerent occupation, violations and abuses of individual and collective rights, and a lack of accountability.

“Our review of the findings and recommendations of previous UN mechanisms and bodies clearly indicates that ending Israel’s occupation, in full conformity with Security Council resolutions, remains essential in stopping the persistent cycle of violence. It is only with the ending of occupation that the world can begin to reverse historical injustices and move towards self-determination of the Palestinian peoples,” Commissioner Miloon Kothari noted.

Commissioner Chris Sidoti added: “Israel clearly has no intention of ending the occupation. In fact, it has established clear policies to ensure complete permanent control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This includes altering the demography of these territories through the maintenance of a repressive environment for Palestinians and a favourable environment for Israeli settlers. Israel's policies and actions build Palestinian frustration and lead to a sense of despair. They fuel the cycle of violence and the protraction of conflict.” The report also noted that the Palestinian Authority frequently uses the occupation as a justification for its own human rights violations and as the core reason for its failure to hold legislative and presidential elections. At the same time, the de facto authorities in Gaza have shown little commitment to upholding human rights, and no adherence to international humanitarian law.

The report, which will be presented to the [50th session of the Human Rights Council](#) on 13 June 2022, concludes by laying out that the Commission will conduct investigations and legal analysis into alleged violations and abuses, and will work with judicial accountability mechanisms toward ensuring individual, State and corporate accountability. It will also carefully assess the responsibilities of third States and those of private actors in the continued policies of occupation.

Background

The [UN Human Rights Council](#) mandated the Commission on 27 May 2021 to “investigate, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law leading up and since 13 April 2021”. In July 2021, the President of the Human Rights Council announced the appointment of Navanethem Pillay (South Africa), Miloon Kothari (India) and Christopher Sidoti (Australia) to serve as the three members of the Commission and indicated that Ms. Pillay would serve as Chair. [Resolution A/HRC/RES/S-30/1](#) further requested the commission of inquiry to “investigate all underlying root causes of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict, including systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity.” The Commission of Inquiry was mandated to report to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly annually from June 2022 and September 2022, respectively.