

Public Statement on the current escalation of violence in Palestine/Israel



31 October 2023

The Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network, Friends of Sabeel Australia and Palestinian Christians in Australia are three networks of predominantly Australian Christians who seek to raise awareness and to advocate for peace grounded in justice for all who live in the Holy Land. Each organisation has extensive knowledge of and connection to the Palestinian Christian community in the Holy Land.

Hear the voices of [Christians in Palestine](#):

“Time and again, we are reminded that western attitudes towards Palestine-Israel suffer from a glaring double standard that humanizes Israeli Jews while insisting on dehumanizing Palestinians and whitewashing their suffering. This is evident in general attitudes towards the recent Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip that killed thousands of Palestinians, the apathy towards the murder of the Palestinian-American Christian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in 2022, and the killing of more than 300 Palestinians including 38 children in the West Bank this year before this recent escalation.”

The terrifying violence that currently is occurring, in not only Gaza, but also throughout the West Bank, is of grave concern. We express deep horror and sadness at the human tragedy in Palestine and in Israel and believe that all the violence is abhorrent: the deaths of Israelis, the abduction of civilians, the merciless denial of access to basic human needs to Gazans, and the deplorable bombing in Gaza of medical facilities, places of worship, schools and other essential services, leaving in the wake thousands dead, including over 3500 children and rendering over one million people homeless.

Seeing the horrors meted out on the vulnerable civilian population in Gaza, it is hard not to conclude that both [genocide](#) and [collective punishment](#) are being committed. The world cannot sit by and watch another genocide occur. No amount of rhetoric can hide the fact that Israel is not acting within the confines of the rules of war.

Since the 7th October 2023 the language uttered by members of the Knesset is truly disturbing, calling for Gaza to be [erased from the face of the earth](#) and the [doomsday bomb](#) to be dropped, yet we hear very little condemnation for this inflammatory language, signalling to Israel it can continue to say and do as it pleases. The actions by Hamas and the use of indiscriminate violence and the trauma it is causing is horrific and we call and pray for the safe release of all civilian hostages. We fail to see however, the murder of innocent babies and civilians at the hands of the State of Israel as being any less horrific. For world leaders to only denounce the actions of Hamas while affirming the right of Israel to do whatever it takes to feel safe is quite appalling. Dispersing [white phosphorus](#) is not acting in self-defence. Israel is committing war crimes and this needs to be strongly condemned.

As horrifying as this spiralling violence is, there is a primary violence that is its cause. For 75 years, Palestinians have been the victims of injustice, dispossession and dehumanising discrimination. Since 1967, they have been under aggressive military occupation, with increasing colonisation of their land and daily denial of their rights; and Palestinian Christians and churches have endured increasing restrictions, especially during their festivals. For 16 years, Gaza has been under a crippling air, land and sea blockade causing unbearable despair. It is incomprehensible how 2 million people could continue to live, caged in an area half the size of Canberra, with no available avenue to travel except through obtaining permits from Israel or Egypt. Not free to develop industry and their economy, to easily trade with the outside world, to have access to sustained safe drinking water and electricity, to be able to realise hopes and dreams of a future.

Hamas formed in 1987 and since then the commentary often cited is that their goal is to 'destroy Israel'. What is rarely reported is that since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Israeli leadership have repeatedly stated their intention is to remove Palestinians from the land. David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of the new State of Israel declared: *"It must be clear that there is no room in the country for both peoples...the only solution is a land of Israel...without Arabs. There is no room here for compromise."* The current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in January 2023 continued this call saying: *"The Jewish people have an exclusive right and unquestionable right to all areas of the Land of Israel. The government will promote and develop settlements in all parts of the Land of Israel – in Galilee, the Negev, the Golan, Judea, and Samaria."* (Palestine). The policies and tactics deployed these past 75 years by Israel toward Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories attest that a land with as few Palestinians on it has always been Israel's goal.

Whilst the horrors of the humanitarian crisis and genocide are unfolding before our eyes in Gaza, there are reports of an escalation of illegal Israeli settler and IDF violence occurring in the occupied West Bank. The Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has personally [handed out weapons](#) to Israeli settlers many of whom already act with impunity towards Palestinians in the West Bank.

Palestinians are met with terror (or kept in perpetual anticipation of it occurring) every day in the West Bank. [Watch](#) this presentation by Military Court Watch or this short [video](#), including footage posted by Israeli settlers themselves during incursions into a small Palestinian village.

It is also repeatedly cited that Israel has a right to defend itself. Who can protect Palestinian communities when they are attacked by Israeli settlers? Who can they turn to for justice when the IDF are duty bound to protect settlers; when only 7% of settler attacks committed against Palestinian persons or property have led to criminal charges, what hope does that give Palestinians that any violation they report will even be investigated? What are they to do when their home is demolished, their olive grove burned, their water is deliberately polluted, they are being shot at whilst herding their sheep...and the list goes on.

Western governments are complicit in this primary violence by frequently declaring friendship with those who perpetrate it, offering unconditional support for a systematic cleansing of Palestinians from their land which has been occurring since 1947. Continuing to see these recent events in isolation as if 'this war' only started with Hamas on the 7th October, is to perpetuate the situation. It must be viewed within the wider confines of 75 years of a systematic ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their land through one approach after another.

We urge the Australian Government to recognise honestly the primary violence causing this conflict and to work seriously and genuinely for the dismantling of the underlying causes. We call for an immediate ceasefire and for dialogue to replace aggression.

As Christians, affirming fundamental biblical truths that every life is of intrinsic value and that there can be no peace without justice, we pray for the United Nations and others who seek to broker a ceasefire and for all who work for justice and reconciliation.

Rev'd Mark Battison - [Friends of Sabeel Australia](#) (FSAU)

Suzan Wahhab - [Palestinian Christians in Australia](#) (PCIA)

Helen Rainger - [Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network](#) (PIEN)