

DISARMING TIMES

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50 Years of Peacemaking 1974-2024

PALESTINE: REPENTANCE AND HOPE

Nachson Amin and Adnan Mansour

Nachson Amin

I was born and raised in Israel, in a Zionist home. Today I'm an activist in Free Palestine Movement, for justice and equal rights for Palestinians. Like every Jewish child in Israel, I learned from infancy that this is our land. That there are other people here who hate us, and we need to defend ourselves from them. Arabs. We didn't even call them Palestinians. In everyday life you don't meet them, there is practically no interaction with them, except when they come as builders, or other low-waged labourers. They existed only on the fringes of my consciousness.

As a young Zionist, I proudly joined the army and served as a combat officer. In my 5 years of service, I was deployed in Gaza, and throughout the West Bank in the occupied Palestinian territories. During the day I made people miserable at checkpoints and on the streets, at night I terrorised women and children inside their homes. All this was done to keep them on their knees, so that they wouldn't dare think about an uprising. And because of how I was indoctrinated, it was clear to me that I was doing the right thing, because they were the bad guys.

I took part in the oppression of the indigenous Palestinians, at a

period the only weapons they had, were stones.

Only later in life did cracks form in my consciousness, and I dared to doubt. On a very long journey, I researched and learned, and discovered that what we were taught were false myths, designed to quiet our conscience.

I learned that the real story is very similar to what happened in other parts of the world. Like in the US, Canada, Australia: people from Europe came here, and decided that this land would be theirs, at the expense of the indigenous people. It is called settler colonialism, and in all these places it involved brutal ethnic cleansing.

My grandparents fled Poland and Lithuania, for obvious reasons of persecution and anti-Semitism, and rightly sought refuge. However, the Zionists didn't come to integrate with the local communities in Palestine, but came to establish a Jewish state. Since it's impossible to establish a Jewish state in a country where the vast majority of the population is not Jewish, they spoke from the beginning about expulsion – 'transfer' in their own language. And that's exactly what happened in the Nakba of 1948. They, or should I say "we" brutally expelled Most of the Palestinians-Muslim

and Christian, we demolished hundreds of villages, so that they would have nowhere to return to, we stole their property and land, and established the JEWISH STATE.

This process, in one way or another, has continued ever since. Because in order to keep the state Jewish, an apartheid regime must be maintained between the river and the sea, and ethnic cleansing must continue endlessly. The horrible genocide taking place in Gaza is just another cruel chapter, of the same reality.

The fact that I grew up on stolen land, and I was part of this oppressive regime, which controls millions of people without freedom, saddens me greatly. Therefore I have done everything I can to dismantle this regime and change this reality.

15 million people live between the River and the Sea, half Jews, half Palestinians. No one is going anywhere, and eventually, all will have to live together.

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DISARMING TIMES

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Disarming Times is compiled by
Harry Kerr,
with the help of Pax Christi members throughout
Australia

Pax Christi Victoria

13 P.O.Box 31, CARLTON SOUTH, Vic 3053

Tel: 03 9077 6464

03 9379 3889

email: ahmkerr@hotmail.com

Pax Christi New South Wales

P.O. Box A 681 Sydney Sth 1235,

Tel: 02 9550 3845 or 0411 450 953

Fax: 02 9519 8471

email: msscjust@smatchat.net.au

Pax Christi Queensland

PO Box 1262

Toowoomba QLD 4350

Tel: 0428 130 895

Email: dtutty@twb.catholic.org.au

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All these people deserve to live in dignity, in peace, with full human rights.

But how do we get there? Unfortunately, history shows that no supreme group has voluntarily relinquished the privileges that its supremacy allows it. Therefore, I don't expect a change to come from within the Israeli public. As with apartheid South Africa, I assume that this will only happen when the world exerts pressure and sanctions on Israel, and forces it to dismantle the current regime on the road to justice. That's what we should all be aiming for.

Is there hope?

In the current situation, with the atrocities and the hatred, it's hard to be optimistic. But as part of my activism, I meet Palestinians, even from the West Bank and Gaza, many of whom have experienced a hellish life that is hard for you to imagine. And yet, despite my past, they embrace me and accept me as a friend. If Adnan and I can be brothers, it gives me hope that change is possible in much wider circles.

I recently met a Jewish woman who grew up in South Africa and was an anti-apartheid activist there. She told me that in the '70s, if you had said in South Africa that one day apartheid would end, you would have been considered insane. With all the hatred and loathing, no one, on any side, imagined that this was even possible. The history is known. Similarly, while it's very difficult today to imagine a reality of equality and justice in Palestine, it is possible, and we must hope for it, and more than that, we must act with all our might to make it happen.

Address by Mr Adnan Mansour

I am a survivor of the Nakba (the catastrophe, the year Palestinians were forcefully displaced from their homeland).

I was a baby – just 40 days old – when I was displaced, along with my entire family and my nation.

Prior to this, and for hundreds of years in Palestine, indigenous Christians, Jews and Muslims had lived in general harmony and prospered. This was largely the case across all Arab nations.

I have been asked to speak today about lament, repentance, and hope.

I lament that we Palestinians lost our lands and our homes at the whim of British colonialists and decisions of the international community shortly after World War 2. My people were callously displaced, our lands stolen, and attempts have been made – in vain – to erase our culture and identity.

I lament that we have had to endure more than 75 years of pain and suffering, victimisation, humiliation, deprivation, and one atrocity after another.

I lament that many of us were forcefully dispersed across the globe. That family ties and our national identity were broken.

I lament that the people of Gaza have endured years of untold violence, destruction, starvation, suffering and endless displacement, herded like animals. Most troubling is the human toll that continues to rise on a daily basis.

1. Gaza Killed: at least 34,000 people, including more than 14,500 children and 8,400 women. Injured: more than 77,000 Missing: more than 8,000

2. Occupied West Bank Killed: at least 487 people, including more than 123 children. Injured: more than 4,800

3. Israel Killed: 1,139 Injured: at least 8,730

The state of Israel is aided and abetted by other nations who are complicit by providing Israel with endless supplies of weapons.

I lament that the political leaders of countries who profess to be law abiding champions of democracy, refuse to support a humanitarian ceasefire to spare the innocent people of Gaza.

Where is the moral compass and humanity in these decisions?

I repent for the suffering endured by the innocent Palestinians and Israelis for generations and continuing to this day. The 7th of October massacre is yet another devastating chapter of the ongoing suffering, inflicted on both sides, since 1948.

I repent that individually we don't have the power to stop the ongoing cycle of violence

1948 I repent that individually we don't have the power to stop the ongoing silence of violence. Repenting is meant to provide solace and lift one's spirit, but our spirit has been brutally abused by the endless suffering and misery inflicted on our people in the West Bank and particularly Gaza, where our people have lived for years in prison-like conditions, deprived of basic necessities and dignity. I am afraid that without hope or real justice the endless, abhorrent violence from both sides will continue.

My grandparents and my parents lived in hope of seeing their home-

land before they died. Sadly, their dreams never materialised. In death my grandparents are separated in Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon. As for my parents, Australia is their resting place.

As a man in my 70s and having been given the privilege to be part of this lucky country for more than half a century, I have a sense of guilt and sorrow that I can't shed. My life has been comfortable and blessed and yet thousands of miles away in my homeland millions are being bombed daily, starved to death, shunted around at a whim and humiliated. I simply can't fathom how this is pos-

sible.

I have lost hope after so many false dawns of peace, and so many promises of a future Palestinian state.

However, without hope there will be no peace and the cycle of suffering and misery will continue for both sides. What we need are people with integrity and genuine humanity to negotiate in good faith a lasting and just resolution for all.

These presentations were given by Nachson Amir and Adnan Mansour at the ANZAC Day service at St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne

THE 2024 ELECTION: INDIA REJECTS STRONGMAN POLITICS

Caesar D'Mello

The *India Express* in *The Economist* and similar commentaries in other outlets prior to India's latest election assessed the future prospects of India, a country that at the start of the eighteenth century was one of the two biggest economies in the world with China. Yet by the end of the British Raj, it had shrunk to just 3% of global GDP. On the eve of independence on 15th August 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, in his historic 'tryst with destiny' speech declared, 'At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom'.

While aware of the task of eradicating poverty, Nehru was envisioning India as a significant power again, and the country he with his fellow freedom fighters wanted it to be. In 1950 India declared itself a secular and democratic republic. Since then, despite myriad challenges, India has regularly returned to the ballot box to elect national governments, except during an Emergency declared from 1975-1977.

This year the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its partners sought a third term. They expected, and most of the media and pundits predicted a landslide victory for the ruling party, but it did not materialise. The BJP-led National Development Alliance (NDA) won the election with just a slim majority in a 542-seat parliament. The BJP lost seats to govern on its own for the first time in ten

years, now depending on partners to form a government. The opposition INDIA alliance nearly doubled their tally of 119 seats in the last parliament to 234. After two terms of BJP government, many among the 642 million Indians who voted (66% of registered voters) were not persuaded by the so-called Modi Guarantee of promises. The people have spoken on what sort of India they desire. It is important to review what sort of India went to the polls.

The BJP pitch for re-election.

The campaign for re-election was conceptually and programmatically linked with Hindu pride. While belief in Hindu supremacy has persisted over two or three centuries, early twentieth century ideologues provided the impetus for a Hindutva-shaped India. Upper caste Hindus led by physician K B Hedgewar founded the militant RSS (*Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* or National Volunteer Organisation) in 1925 as a paramilitary organisation to unite Hindus. Hindu nationalist leaders admired Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, with one of them, B S Moonje, visiting the latter in Rome in 1931, and conferring with a fascist organisation to return with ideas on militarising Hindu society. The RSS, the ideological mentor of the BJP, using Hindu scriptures and well-honed strategic organising skills, proclaims India as the land of Hindus, even though minorities have been enmeshed in pluralist India over centuries yet considered alien.

Mahatma Gandhi, the revered 'Father of the Nation', and Nehru opted for a secular, equal India for all considering its religious and linguistic diversity. However, Hindu supremacist leaders insisted on a monocultural India, asserting that minorities lived in the country on sufferance. An activist associated with the RSS, Nathuram Godse, assassinated Gandhi a year after Independence, for his efforts to reconcile Hindus and Muslims, and is admired in BJP folklore. The RSS, which Prime Minister Modi joined at the age of eight, continues as an influential force with thousands of cadres at its disposal.

The BJP campaign. Modernising changes afoot served as a backdrop. The campaign assumed the growth of digital and physical infrastructure, unrelenting proliferation of airports and modern shopping malls, streets clogged with the latest cars and motorbikes, inter alia, as demonstrations of growing affluence. India's GDP poised to become the third largest economy in the world in a few years, and its increasing geopolitical heft as a burgeoning industrial, technological, pharmaceutical, foreign investment, commercial, development, technology sharing and space hub were a focus, directly or indirectly.

The centrepiece of BJP electioneering was Modi, with his strongman leadership credited for generating

economic growth, power and a confident international image of the country, including the hailing of India as a *vishvaguru* (teacher of the world), while the foundations laid for all of this by previous governments were ignored. Making India a *viksit Bharat* (a developed country) by 2047 a national aspiration, BJP presented an image of a 'Shining India' to its vast constituency with reminders of promises delivered on making Hindus proud, some of them yearning for a Hindu Kingdom. Modi's image, as a champion of Hinduism, was enhanced by his self-designated role as a messenger of God.

Civil Society's counterview of India. Alongside opposition parties, civil society in India has been strenuously interrogating the Modi regime's vision. Well-known commentator, Parakala Prabhakar, wrote recently: "scores of civil society organisations from across the nation with little ambition to gain office are working with unimaginable zeal to rescue the core values of the nation".

Hindu Majoritarianism. The Modi government's attempts to place India in a Hindutva strait-jacket, with apparent hate and bigotry, at the cost of social cohesion, are vigorously resisted. Historian Ramachandra Guha denounced the emerging Hindu majoritarianism as 'a cancer that... poisons the soul of India'. Civil society perspectives percolated through the population, as secular and religious groups, including churches, have been prominent through voter education and related programmes.

Minorities being unconstitutionally reduced to second class citizenship has been particularly distressing, with Muslims, for instance, feeling particularly targeted. Hindu majoritarianism has seeped into the consciousness of activist Hindutva supporters and is reflected in the mounting violence towards minorities, especially Christians and Muslims, as churches and mosques are desecrated and destroyed.

The litany of areas of governance critiqued by civil society includes a subtle encroachment by the Delhi-based Central government on constitutionally listed power and re-



sponsibilities reserved for the states, thereby undermining Indian federalism. Democratic institutions have eroded. The Indian public service fails to fulfill their expected function of providing advice without 'fear or favour' to the government. The judiciary, too, by and large, has not helped India's democracy with favourable interpretations of legislation to the Modi government. Educational institutions have not been spared either, as vice-chancellors and professors at public universities are vetted by the RSS, school textbooks glorify Hinduism and expunge long Muslim/non-Hindu history in India, and science teaching is expected to incorporate Vedic notions of two and three millennia ago. Aspects of foreign policy, too, seemed to have been conducted through the prism of Hindutva. Furthermore inequality, in a vaunted major power, drew much attention. Eight hundred million, or some 60% of the population, now need free food rations to survive. At the same time, corporate India is doing well, with billionaires and millionaires multiplying and the affluent classes thriving financially, educationally and technologically, rendering India a markedly unequal country in the world. With illiberalism growing, most of the media, controlled by the government directly or its cronies, helped amplify the BJP agenda. The average voter's anxieties arising from it framed the election.

A turning point for India?

Undoubtedly the 2024 election has turned out to be a watershed election, believed to have saved India's democracy. Early analysis shows that Modi, the focus of BJP messaging, was endorsed by the urban, upper class and tech savvy constituencies, but not by Dalits and lower caste communities, rural and regional populations, Muslims, unemployed youth, women, among

others, among whom the INDIA coalition made huge gains at the expense of the BJP and their partners. They humbled a seemingly invincible Prime Minister, despite opposition parties denied a level playing field with a host of obstacles placed in their way. Modi was judged to be too close to crony capitalists, both on a personal level and as associated with their massive infrastructure programmes, while the less fortunate had to make do with slogans such as *subka vikas* (everyone's progress), regarded by them as empty talk in the face of rising unemployment and costs of living. Enough people in the electorate made the distinction between empty symbolism and good governance, and neither did the appeal to Hindu pride and icons mattered. They thwarted designs by the BJP to achieve a two-thirds majority in Parliament that would have enabled them to change the Constitution and turn India into a Hindu Rashtra (kingdom), with protections for minorities and secularism removed. There is more balance in the political system now, with a precious opportunity to embark on what some are calling 'a process of democratisation' and disown the sobriquet of an 'Electoral Autocracy' bestowed by the Electoral Democracy Index on the 'world's largest democracy'.

The people have rejected the autocratic instincts, identity politics and majoritarianism masked by a democratic apparatus. They have sent a clear message to both the government and the opposition that they demand an India of justice for all. India desperately cries for compassionate politics that translates into holistic development and empowerment of its people, who according to the Human Development Index are now ranked 134th out of 193 countries.

The election outcome will provide the incentive to change the direction of India's present trajectory. The opposition is of a critical size to nearly match the government and hold it to account with more conviction, commitment and professionalism in parliamentary committees, including finance, defence

and home affairs, and will be able to insist on checks and balances as unilateral decision-making hopefully diminishes.

The *vasudaiva kutumbakam* (the world as family) slogan, appropriate for the G20 meeting in New Delhi in 2023, is also apt as a national feature, practised with *maitri* (fellowship). Such an outlook is consonant with Pax Christi's call for a truly human, peaceful and caring community, informed by Pope Francis' advocacy of Fraternity for a

troubled world. In a year with more than half the world's population engaged in elections, the magnitude of India's challenge at home linked with its economic and geopolitical significance makes its election a crucial one for it and the world, as its disenfranchised people illustrate the character of a true democracy. A transformed India will bring hope and inspiration to the people of India and other countries struggling as human communities. The world awaits.

Caesar D'Mello

(caesarmdm@gmail.com) is a member of Pax Christi Australia, Pax Christi Asia Pacific, and the International Board of Pax Christi International. He was formerly National Director of Christian World Service, the National Council of Churches in Australia's agency for overseas aid and development. He recently visited India, the land of his early experience of stratification by wealth, class and caste. .

HELEN HILL: ECUMENICAL, ACTIVIST, ACADEMIC

Pat Walsh

Helen Mary Hill died at Caritas Christi Hospice in Kew on May 7, 2024, struck down by cancer. She was a huge presence in Dili, East Timor, but also amongst veterans like me. No-one can quite believe she has left us. RN listeners will feel the same when Michelle Grattan and Philip Adams hang up their microphones.

Helen had a rich and varied career during a long life straddling academia and activism. As I knew her mainly in relation to East Timor, my comment on her other involvements must be limited, an injustice to her and those causes.

In brief, Helen was born on February 22, 1945 and grew up in the suburb of Blackburn in Melbourne, the eldest of four siblings. She was an aunt and great-aunt to eleven nephews and nieces. She received her secondary education at Presbyterian Ladies College and was a graduate of the universities of Monash, Melbourne and the ANU. Victoria University awarded her an honorary doctorate. She tutored and taught at Monash University, RMIT and Victoria University and lived in many different places, those I know of being Canberra, Suva, Fitzroy, Dili and London, where she studied at the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Like academics such as Dr Herb Feith and Dr Joe Camilleri, she never saw academia as an end in itself but as a way of enlightening others and making the world a better place. She was active in movements opposed to the Vietnam war,



apartheid in South Africa, and colonialism including in Melanesia and Micronesia, which included working for the Commonwealth Secretariat in Fiji. She was active in the Labor Party and worked for MPs in Canberra. She didn't speak languages other than English. Instead she spoke the international language of warmth and sustained engagement that everybody understood, though she had a loud and unmistakably distinctive laugh (and voice when worked up). That she has been farewelled at the Church of All Nations in Carlton says it best.

For environmental reasons and because she literally had no time for material pursuits, Helen lived simply. I encountered her recently on the Brunswick Street tram. She was taking her milk bottle to buy fresh milk from the St David dairy. She didn't have a car in Melbourne or Timor where she walked everywhere and was a familiar sight in central Dili, fixture backpack included. In Canberra she was mobile. Taking me home one night in her

VW, she pulled up in the middle of a Canberra street when a police breathalyser came into view, lights flashing. We'd had drinks at the ANU after our meeting. I said, "Helen you can't stop here!" She edged forward and blew timorously into the device. "Can you blow harder, Mrs!" asked the policeman. She did and we drove on sighing at our lucky escape.

Helen's orbit was also ecumenical. As a student she was involved in and influenced by the Student Christian Movement (SCM), the counterpart to the Catholic Young Christian Students to which I was a national adviser in the 1970s. This opened the way for her engagement with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and World Council of Churches (WCC). In Dili, she was an active member of the Hosana Church where my former boss, Rev Agostinho de Vasconcelos, a CAVR commissioner, worked. Helen helped the church establish a Centre of Theological Formation and gave courses there on community development, gender justice and ecology. Helen was working on a memoir but never finished it, so I can't be definite about when she became involved with the Timor issue. It's said, however, that the penny dropped when she was in London during the final days of the Portuguese empire and activists enquired what Australians were doing about Portuguese Timor. On her return to Australia, she produced a 20,000 word booklet called *The Timor Story* that served as a key reference for

many in Australia and internationally, including people like me who were new to the issue and trusted Helen's professionalism. The Timor Information Service founded by John Waddingham published the booklet, offering Helen a five per cent royalty on sales which she refused. I used it to prepare my first briefing for the national YCS. During the same period and encouraged by Dr Herb Feith, whose course on Politics of the Third World she tutored in at Monash, Helen met Jose Ramos-Horta who invited her to Dili which she visited January-March 1975. Following the Indonesian invasion, Helen completed a study of Fretilin in 1978.

In 1979 I invited Helen to contribute an article to the first edition of the ACFOA Development Dossier. Entitled The NGOs and East Timor, her piece is an excellent account of the origins of Australian civil society/aid agency involvement with East Timor. Early triggers, she writes, were an ACFOA Development Education Conference in Tasmania in 1973 which she attended and where there was "a good discussion of Portuguese colonialism". A second was a bombshell front page media report in May 1973 that accused TAA and BHP of dealing with Portuguese Timor in possible breach of UN Resolutions. In response, Action for World Development (AWD) and World University Service (WUS),

both of which I suspect Helen had links with, called for economic ties with Portuguese Timor to be severed. This plus Australian NGO criticism of the top-down Suharto model of development and his violations of human rights laid the foundations that guided aid and development agency responses throughout the whole East Timor issue until 1999. On the day of Indonesia's full scale invasion, December 7, 1975, Helen co-founded the Australia East Timor Association (AETA). Bill Roberts of AWD was its first president.

Helen's first love was community development education. Following East Timor's independence in 2002 she was able to give this passion full rein, keenly aware that it was fundamental to the building of the new nation.

From her base at Victoria University (VU), she promoted study tours of East Timor, courses on community development in East Timor, seminars and partnerships, including one with the Dili Institute of Technology. Some 200 East Timorese have graduated from VU, including the likes of Dulce Soares now Minister for Education in Timor-Leste. VU hosts the Timor-Leste consulate, has a significant library on East Timor and was instrumental in the formation of the Timor-Leste Studies Association which Helen co-founded. Following her retirement from VU, Helen took up residence in Dili. Inter

alia, she helped establish a community development department at the national university and engaged in various initiatives to promote educational reform such as 'mother tongue' literacy in early school years. Helen was an active user of Facebook. She had an envious ability to appear as the first image on many pages! She had hundreds of friends, followed a wide range of groups and posted regularly on her own page and Memories of the Old Hotel Turismo.

East Timor recognized Helen's work by granting her an Ordem de Timor-Leste in 2014. Her death was greeted in Timor with an outpouring of sadness and love. Written statements of condolence, often accompanied by personal memories, were made by the president, prime minister, leader of Fretilin, parliament, NGOs and educationists. I was told that a Requiem Mass for Helen at the Motael church on the Dili waterfront on Saturday, May 11, was splendid and heartfelt. Her ashes were taken to Timor and deposited there, her second home.

Pat Walsh AM, OTL is the author of books and articles on East Timor. He was an early teacher of the Indonesian language in Victoria, co-founder of Inside Indonesia magazine, director of the ACFOA Human Rights Office in Fitzroy and special adviser to East Timor's commission for truth

In 2005/6 Pax Christi Victoria sponsored and supported two students from Timor Leste : Francisco (Chico)Soares and Maria Soares to come to Melbourne to study Community Development at Victoria University. Helen played a crucial role, supporting them through the unfamiliar Australian academic environment.

They sent these messages.

Chico Soares writes

It is very sad to hear the passing of Prof. Helen Hill yesterday. She is very special to many of us (myself included) in Timor. Her commitment over the years and during the independence struggle is highly regarded. Please pass our condolences to her family from our family. Last time we met, my wife, daughters, and I dropped her off at her apartment some time ago before her departure to Australia. It is indeed very sad news for most of us in Timor, specifically the VU Alumni. We will hold a requiem mass here in Dili this Saturday. Regards. Chico

Maria (Ceuzinha)Soares writes:

Mana [Helen Mary Hill](#) Doben There are no words that I can say for this moment. But only word Thank you, Obrigada Mana! Today I bow my head to pay my last homage for all things you have done to me and my country. It is only prayers that we can offer to accompany your journey to God's house. Mana Helen I believe that God has prepare a Mana Helen I believe that God has prepare a paradise for you to stay eternally as you deserve it. Rest in Peace Mana Helen we will forever miss your voice and smile. Our deep sympathy and condolence to all your dear families in Australia

Ceu = Maria's nickname; Mana = when addressing an older woman; doben = beloved

PACIFIC ISLAND CHURCHES FIGHT FOR A FUTURE WITHOUT FOSSIL FUELS

James Shri Bhagwan

Climate financing proposed by the highest polluter nations is akin to blood money, the churches say

IN MARCH, CIVIL society groups across the Pacific — including churches — unveiled a landmark declaration to end fossil fuel expansion in the Pacific region. The Naiuli Declaration provides a moral rudder from Pacific communities to guide the international Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Pacific Islanders are championing the treaty as a legally binding mechanism to end new exploration and to support the rapid, equitable, and lasting phase-out of fossil fuels, core drivers of climate change and sea-level rise. To date, 12 nations have endorsed the treaty, including fossil fuel-producing countries Timor-Leste and Colombia. In the U.S., Maine, California, and Hawaii have also endorsed the treaty.

In envisioning our fossil free future, the Naiuli Declaration carries the twin aspects of vulnerability and resilience (the term *Na i Uli* draws from indigenous Fijian words for the steering oar in traditional double-hulled ocean canoes). There is the vulnerability of communities facing an existential crisis caused by climate change, putting at risk livelihoods, culture, our deep spiritual relationship with land and ocean, and the possibility for climate-induced displacement. The sense of exile evoked by this vulnerability resonates with the psalmist, who laments: "For there our captors asked of us songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:3-4).

For many Pacific island churches, climate financing proposed by the highest polluter nations is akin to the biblical 30 pieces of silver — blood money offered in exchange



for the betrayal of Pacific Islanders who are demanding a phaseout of fossil fuels. Last fall, the Pacific Conference of Churches, representing 19 Pacific island nations and territories, urged leaders at the COP28 U.N. Climate Change Conference to "hear the cry of our people, land, and ocean and to remember that without maintaining the 1.5 degree target, all climate adaptation and loss and damage funding is blood money."

Our Pacific people are resilient. We are rooted in our traditional Indigenous wisdom, our practice of living in harmony with creation, and our Christian faith, which provides us with a prophetic voice to counter the greenwashing from the fossil fuel industry. Amid unsustainable development and a global culture of mining and extraction, our communities continue to live out Paul's words: "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God" (Romans 12:2). Our churches struggle for survival, but we must also articulate a vision of an abundant Pacific that flourishes because of climate justice. This is why so many have endorsed the fossil fuel treaty and the Naiuli Declaration.

As Pacific climate warrior Suluaifi Brianna Fruean said, "A fossil fuel-free Pacific is not only a dream for the future, but a memory of our past." The prophetic narrative in the Naiuli Declaration rescues many Pacific stories that have been stolen, greenwashed, and used to promote

false climate "solutions" (such as the proposal to replace surface

used to promote false climate "solutions" (such as the proposal to replace surface extraction of fossil fuels with rapacious deep-sea mining). The declaration's call for

a "just and equitable transition" targets important economic issues for the Pacific, such as reforming existing financial institutions and providing transition finance "without furthering debt and aid dependency for the Pacific."

Our communities are promoting conversion to low-carbon transportation systems for this huge maritime region. The estimated cost of replacing all existing fossil fuel electricity generation in eight Pacific island countries is around \$1 billion. This is less than 14 percent of the amount of money that Australia gave to the fossil fuel industry in subsidies in 2022 and 2023, according to "Ki Mua," a report issued last year by the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative. It's less than half a percent of the profit made by the top five fossil fuel companies in 2023.

We have global and legal frameworks for a just transition, but we have not had a moral framework to bring together the aspirations of the Pacific people. The Naiuli Declaration is a manifesto, a vision, and an agenda for a fossil fuel-free Pacific. As we imagine our future together, we claim the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty as the way forward. It is a sacred covenant for governments, communities, and all creation.

James Shri Bhagwan, an ordained minister in the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, is general secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches.

THE WEST BELIEVES ANTI-SEMITISM IS A MORE EGREGIOUS PROBLEM THAN GENOCIDE

Henry Reynolds

The loss of Western authority as a result of Israel's genocidal attack on Gaza has merely sped up changes already underway for a generation.

It was a coincidence of course. As Australia Day came to an end the seventeen judges of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) were preparing to deliver their preliminary response to the South African genocide case against Israel presented to the Court on the 29th of December 2023. South Africa had taken this action as a leading member of the Global South and a founding member of the BRICS economic block. Thirty countries supported the case. Only two European states, Ireland and Slovenia, joined the twenty eight countries from all parts of the Global South.

By a very large majority of 16 to 1 on some points and 15 to 2 on others the Court found for South Africa, accepting that there was a plausible case that the Palestinians should be protected 'from acts of genocide.' The Court did not accede to the South African request for a demand for a ceasefire but it set out a series of conditions that Israel was required to meet 'in accordance with its obligations under the genocide Convention.' It was ordered to 'take all measures within its power' to prevent prohibited by the Convention, in particular killings, causing serious physical or mental harm or the deliberate infliction of conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of the population in whole or in part.'

These provisional measures were legally binding on Israel, which simply ignored them and the mass killing, profound suffering and physical destruction continued without pause. And the rest of the world looked on with horror. While the countries of the Western World did not go as far as Netanyahu in claim-



ing that the ICJ was acting as 'the legal arm of Hamas' they were dismissive. The American leadership declared that they could not see any evidence of genocide and that the South African case was meritless. Like Australia, other countries simply ignored what had happened, its gravity notwithstanding. In our case there has been no official reaction, no legal briefing from the Attorney General and no known use of the word genocide by anyone in government. It clearly has been a case of well-disciplined avoidance. But it's not Western governments alone that have deliberately crafted their language and their diplomacy to protect Israel from the outrage felt around the world, arguing with well-rehearsed casuistry that anti-Semitism is a more egregious problem than genocide. The Western media is equally culpable. Surveys from outside and leaks from inside tell the same story. There has been a deliberate corruption of the news to defend Israel itself and the sensibility of Zionists everywhere else. And this applies to the great bastions of the liberal intellectual establishment—*The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, the *BBC* and the *ABC*. And now with the rise of student activism the most prestigious American universities are behaving in exactly the same way sending in riot police to crush the student movement and then to blame the resulting violence and turmoil on the victims.

And at what cost? Do any of Israel's cheer squad estimate the catastrophic loss of moral authority visited on the major western powers and their minor camp followers? Who will ever again tolerate those tiresome lectures about "the international rules based order" which Australian leaders proclaim all around the world. There are also those homilies about human rights and the corollary that the Western democracies are the exemplary models to be admired and emulated. Perhaps the most damaging aspect of all is that America and the leading European powers have been shown to be arch hypocrites who don't practice what they preach. One only has to look at Israel and observe that it has ignored international law and evaded innumerable U.N Declarations virtually since its foundation since 1948. This is the country that Foreign Minister Wong has called a 'steadfast friend' for whom we provide 'immovable support.' A week or so ago, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian referred to the discovery of mass graves at the al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. As far as we can tell this event was not reported in our mainstream media nor commented by anyone in the Australian Government. He observed that vast swathes of Gaza were now left in rubble and more than a million civilians 'were struggling in despair on the brink of death.' The fact that this was happening in the 21st century was 'an outrage to the moral conscience of humanity and tramples on the most fundamental aspect of international justice.' While it is true that the devil can quote scripture, this statement is far closer to global opinion than the cautious weasel words which emanate from Australian commentators. The loss of Western authority as a result of Israel's genocidal attack on Gaza has merely sped up changes

already underway for a generation. The latest iteration of decolonisation has seen a pervasive re-interpretation of the history of European imperialism, which has analysed the reasons for the rise of the West and focussed attention on the pillage of the outer world's resources, the role of slavery and the theft of indigenous land. Demands for reparation grow louder. Respect for the old Imperial powers is withering away. It is a process which has been observed for some time now by

the Singaporean intellectual leader, Kishore Mahbubani, who wrote in London's *Financial Times* in December last year that: 'It's no secret that the west captured the imagination and respect of the rest of the world for centuries. However, what is a secret—because it is happening silently and invisibly in the minds of billions—is that the west is now losing that respect.' It is here that the campus rebellions that have spread from America are doing the work that would have been

impossible for the discredited leaders of government, the media and the universities in the West. They are taking a stand for human rights and those other principles that have been corrupted by support for Israel's catastrophic siege of Gaza. They have intimated to the rest of the world that redemption is possible. *Henry Reynolds is an eminent Australian historian. From Pearls and Irritations.*

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE GOSPEL IS AT STAKE PAX CHRISTI CALLS ON FAITH LEADERS TO SPEAK OUT ON BEHALF OF GAZA Claude Mostowik

Faith leaders should stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people and should call on the Australian government to condemn all violence that threatens a just future for the people of Palestine, Israel and the Middle East.

This call comes from Pax Christi, an ecumenical Christian organisation. Pax Christi Australia has sent the following appeal to all local faith leaders as it prepares to take part in the traditional annual Palm Sunday peace rally on 24 April. The appeal reads:

Pax Christi Australia, part of the international Christian peace movement Pax Christi International, based in Brussels, works to promote peace with justice and nonviolence locally and globally, having strong links with justice for the people of Palestine.

We mourn the suffering endured in Israel and Palestine and call on peace groups and religious leaders to stridently promote active nonviolence in the pursuit of peace with justice.

Pax Christi Australia has called on the Australian government, to condemn all violence which threatens a just and nonviolent future.

On Palm Sunday, crowds in Jerusalem showered blessings of peace upon The One who came in the name of God, whereas some religious leaders told Jesus to silence his disciples, to which he replied, "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." Gaza has become a killing field and the stones, the rubble, cry out to the world of genocide and

the cries of people under the rubble. The stones cry out through the voice and actions of millions of people. These cries call for response. Yet, there is shameful silence from many church leaders who have yet to voice the call for peace, a call for support of the International Court of Justice, and call for humanitarian aid. It is morally derelict that the silence for peace is crushed by a complicity with Israel's evil genocide that slaughters our human brothers and sisters.

The dignified pleas of Pope Francis and United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres to stop the violence have been ignored. As true followers of the nonviolent Jesus, we are deeply distressed at the silence of those with political and religious power and moral responsibilities. The credibility of the gospel is at stake.

We stand with Pope Francis who said recently, "I will never tire of reiterating my call, addressed in particular to those who have political responsibility: 'stop the bombs and missiles now, end hostile stances [everywhere].'" And we call upon our heads of churches not to tire.

Pope Francis has repeatedly stated that dialogue is the only path toward a peaceful future. Dialogue must be accompanied by justice and self-determination which Pope Paul VI proclaimed in his 1972 [Day of Peace message](#): "If you want peace, work for justice." Pax Christi joins in the heartfelt appeal for a permanent ceasefire where all women and men of goodwill raise their cry for peace.

It is time that Australian Church Leaders imitate loudly, bravely, and honourably the Voice of Peace spoken by Jesus, and by our Pope. "Every day, in my heart, I carry the pain and suffering of the populations in Palestine and Israel due to the ongoing hostilities." (Pope Francis).

Let us stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people who feel abandoned, forsaken, and face genocide alone.

We demand that Western democracies (Australia, USA, United Kingdom, European Union countries) stop endorsing and supporting Israel in its criminal activity. We demand an end to the occupation of Palestine, which is the root of violence, and to stop illegal Israeli settlements. We demand that funding for UNRWA be reinstated.

Luther Pastor in Bethlehem, Munther Isaac, condemns many when he said in February 2024, 'When churches justify a genocide or are silent watching from a distance, making carefully crafted balanced statements – the credibility of the Gospel is at stake'.

Negotiations and mutual trust are the only way forward.

'The Middle East does not need war but peace, a peace built on justice, dialogue, and the courage of fraternity.' – Pope Francis.

Fr. Claude Mostowik is President of Pax Christi Australia

PERPETRATORS OF ATTACKS ON ROHINGYA IN BUTHIDAUNG MUST BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE

Kyaw Win,

22 May 2024 London, UK
Burma Human Rights Network is extremely alarmed by recent attacks on the Rohingya in Buthidaung Township by the Arakan Army and the Burmese junta. These attacks have included airstrikes, artillery shelling, and widespread

arson. The attacks on the Rohingya occurred as AA made a significant push to take complete control of Buthidaung Township away from the Burmese military. Rohingya civilians have been increasingly conscripted into the conflict, particularly by the Burmese army, who use them as little more than cannon fodder in the field.

BHRN contacted two Rohingya residents from Ward 2 of downtown Buthidaung. Both residents said that they witnessed widespread arson by the Arakan Army against Rohingya properties.

The locals told BHRN that before the fighting, AA ordered Rohingya from Ward 1 through Ward 7 to leave the area by May 16th. By May 17th at 11 pm, AA began setting fires in Ward 5. A 34-year-old Rohingya man from Ward 2 told BHRN, "All the residents came out of their houses and moved wherever they could. Some people went to the school, and others to the hospital to take temporary shelter. There was heavy gunfire throughout the night by AA towards Rohingya residents in town. The following morning, some people returned to their houses, but on the morning of the 18th, the AA came to Ward 2 and ordered everyone to leave the town. The residents of the main town areas then started to leave, moving to villages such as Sein Nyin Pyar (Saindi Parang), Harang Khali, and a few other nearby villages to save their lives. Some people stayed at the high school that night, but the AA knew this and fired mortar shells and gunshots at the school." The resident told BHRN that the shelling and gunfire killed



eight people. A 25-year-old Rohingya woman from Ward 2 said that artillery shelling killed eight people in the school and another four outside of it. During the fighting, military warplanes [reportedly](#) killed another 12 Rohingya while bombing the area.

The 34-year-old man told BHRN that while he fled, AA confiscated their phones or anything that might contain evidence of what transpired. He said they also took cash and valuables from the Rohingya who were fleeing. While fleeing, he said he saw dead bodies scattered across the road and a large fire in Buthidaung downtown that he believed was coming from a Rohingya area. He also said he saw a Rohingya administrator shot and killed in front of him for ignoring questions by AA soldiers.

Buthidaung is now under AA control, and, according to the man BHRN spoke with, the Rohingya who've fled were told by AA to flee to Maungdaw Township or Bangladesh. The humanitarian needs of the Rohingya are great as they fled without being able to take supplies, and the conflict prevents aid from entering the area. There is reasonable fear among the Rohingya that more will die as they are unable to access food, clean water, and medicine. There are estimates of hundreds of Rohingya dead or injured in the attacks, but BHRN cannot independently confirm any total number of deaths or injuries at this time. The Arakan Army has denied committing arson attacks against the Rohingya, but witness accounts increasingly describe AA as the perpetrator.

BHRN's Executive Director, Kyaw Win, said, We condemn these attacks on the Rohingya in the strongest terms. The Arakan Army is treating the Rohingya the same as the Burmese military. What is the point of a revolutionary group that utilizes the same barbaric tactics on minorities as the

junta? The uprising in Burma cannot be used as a vehicle for new leaders to unleash the same old oppression. BHRN calls on the Arakan Army to immediately stop any attacks on Rohingya or their property. The leadership of the Arakan Army must ensure that it is understood through the entire chain of command that all civilians are to be protected. Those involved in the attacks against the Rohingya should be held accountable by international legal bodies, and consideration should be given to how these attacks may fit into the ongoing cases of genocide against the Rohingya. The current attacks against the Rohingya by AA and the junta should be considered violations of the provisional measures by the International Court of Justice meant to protect the Rohingya from further harm. If the junta falls, the Arakan Army should consider its future standing in the international community and what sanctions or charges they may face. The future of Burma cannot be led by a new set of military strongmen who disregard the lives of civilians and violate international law.

Organisation's Background

BHRN is based in London and operates across Burma/Myanmar working for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in the country. BHRN has played a crucial role in advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

Kyaw Win is Executive Director of the Burma Human Rights Network

DECOLONIZING PALESTINE, The Land, The People, The Bible KILLING FOR COUNTRY, A Family Story

Reviewed by Harry Kerr

D*ecolonising Palestine, The Land, the People, the Bible, by Mitri Raheb, Orbis Books, Maryknoll New York, 2023.*

Killing for Country, A Family Story, David Marr, Black Ink, Collingwood, Vic. 2023.

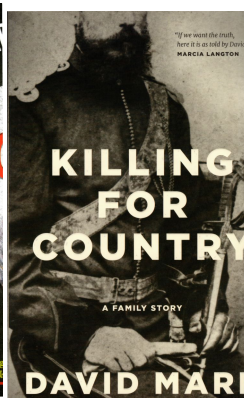
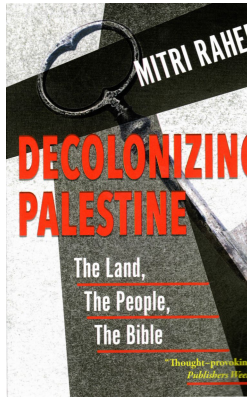
I am reviewing these two books together because even though they deal with situations a long way apart, I believe there to be important links. I believe these links challenge us as participants in Australia and as people of faith.

Rev Dr. Mitri Raheb served as the senior pastor of the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem from June 1987 to May 2017 and as the President of the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land from 2011-2016. He is a widely published Palestinian Theologian and founder an president of Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem.

David Marr is an Australian journalist, author, and progressive political and social commentator. His areas of expertise include the law, Australian politics, censorship, the media, and the arts

Decolonizing Palestine is a must read for anyone who seeks to understand the political, human and spiritual dimensions of the Israel/Palestine / Gaza crisis. Dr Raheb writes as a Palestinian who lives and works in Palestine. He is also an internationally recognised scholar.

Raheb describes and analyses "Settler Colonialism" and how it applies to Israel. He describes how it delegitimises and dehumanises the Palestinian occupants of the land. It has created an Apartheid State and its actions point to ethnic cleansing. He goes on to analyse the Zionist phenomenon and how it developed in alliance with the imperial powers, the United Kingdom and the United States. He shows how Zionism has



been appropriated by many in the Christian community to support the aspirations of the state of Israel. Christian Zionism is not confined to the far right. Following the Second World War many liberal theologians promoted the State of Israel as having a central role in the divine plan. He shows how Israel became an important player in the British and then American imperial project, becoming the key to American projection of power in the Middle East.

In what is the most important part of the book, Raheb deals in some depth with the question of the "Promised Land" and the divine covenant. He shows how the covenant was for all peoples in the land and that it was never unconditional. He shows how Palestine was made up of several racial groups and clans. Jews were only one and how they only controlled only a small part of historic Palestine. The ancestors of today's Palestinians have always been there. Their claim to the land is as strong as or stronger than that of the Jews. He shows how the claim to divine election, Jewish and Christian, is a spiritual not a political matter. God's calling is to live in God's way, not to dominate a particular land. The notion of Divine election has been appropriated by the empires of the Christian West. The settler societies of the European empires justified themselves by the claim to be chosen by

God to build a new nation on what they claimed to be a new "promised land." Election of course, justified the marginalising of the native people.

Killing for Country is a graphic description of the creation of the settler society in Australia. It is a story of brutality as the First Nations people were pushed out of the way by wealthy settlers who saw First Nations People at best as a source of cheap labour, as "lesser breeds without the law" as inferior and less than human. While less overtly religious, there was an underlying assumption that the settlers had a sense of their own "manifest destiny" which placed on them the responsibility to dominate the original inhabitants until. The churches colluded by establishing "Missions" to the indigenous people whose purpose was to beat the Aboriginality out of them and bring them into so called "civilisation."

Killing for country is a confronting book but a must read. The settler colonies set the stage for the country we are today. It is assumed that we have a right to the land. In spite of some notable advances we are still at war with the First Nations people. Our history like Israel's points to ethnic cleansing and the creation of an Apartheid state. All our 'Acknowledgements of Country' may only distract us from what is really happening. The rejection of the "Voice" says it all.

***Decolonizing Palestine* can be purchased for AUD 28.15 from www.orbisbooks.com, or www.booktopia.com.au for AUD 42.25, Readings AUD \$56 .**

***Killing for Country* is \$40 from Readings and Dymocks, \$31.75 from booktopia and from local libraries**

NOTICE BOARD

NEW SOUTH WALES

Pax Christi Meetings

We normally meet on the First Monday of each month at 6.00pm for shared meal that members bring and the meeting follows at 6.30 pm.

Contact: Claude Mostowik
(02) 9550 3845 or 0411 450 953

The venue: 209A Edgware Road, Enmore.

QUEENSLAND

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Pax Christi Queensland

Contact:

Pam Nair (Secretary): 07 3711 3273

pamnair@hotmail.com

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SHARED MEAL

1 p.m. Bring food to share

MEETING 2.00 PM Finish 4 P.M
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