

Just Peace

Read – Learn – Act

Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory:

An exploration of the
path to peace and what
you can do

Everyday, ordinary Palestinians
and Israelis stand up for dignity,
equality and a just peace, often at
great cost. **Let's stand with them.**



Just Peace

Why this resource is for you

‘Seek peace and pursue it’

Psalms 34.14

The lives of many people in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory have been characterised by fear, oppression and poverty for decades. Yet in our churches and places of worship, it's often a topic we shy away from talking about, seeing it as too difficult, controversial or uncomfortable.

This booklet is here to help you:

- **understand more about the situation**
- **equip you to talk about what is happening**
- **be part of taking action for a just peace**

You will learn about:

- **the experience of people living under occupation**
- **some of the history and context of the region**
- **the barriers to peace**
- **what is required for a path to peace**
- **what you can do**

As Christians, we need many things to help us translate our faith into action for justice – including prayer, knowledge, courage, or a community of people who share our commitments.

We hope that this booklet, and the work of Christian Aid, can play a part in that journey.

A note on content: The content for this resource is drawn from Christian Aid's **Where's Palestine Report (2021)** and the voices of our long-standing partners across Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IoPt). Any learning resource on IoPt could never present a comprehensive and consensus view of history and contemporary events. We encourage you to engage with this resource, prayerfully, with this in mind.

Poverty and peace

Why Christian Aid is working in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory

Decades of violent conflict, displacement, oppression and control of Palestinian lives by Israel have resulted in deep inequality in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Palestinian people are living in poverty with many reliant on aid to survive. The recent war in Gaza has intensified poverty and the humanitarian crisis for Palestinians across the Middle East.

Christian Aid believes that everyone is created equal and should be able to live life in all its fullness. We're committed to tackling injustice, inequality and poverty wherever it exists. Injustice is not inevitable; it is the consequence of oppression and impunity that must be directly addressed.

A just peace, one grounded in accountability, the rule of law and recognition of historic injustice, is the best way to achieve security for all and ensure that Palestinians can at last live in dignity free from poverty.

Since the 1950s Christian Aid has worked closely with Palestinian and Israeli partners and communities upholding human rights, exposing the barriers to peace and tackling poverty at its roots.





Stories of the land

'If we use Israeli roads, we could get arrested. We need to feel safe in our homes and in our fields. Even in my home, I don't feel safe. We deserve to feel safe and free. Our dignity must not be affected by the occupation, we need to be strong and to keep resisting for this land.'

Ismael Joudeh Amad Speih, Al Hada town, Bethlehem, West Bank.

Ismael is a Palestinian farmer and lives with his wife and six children. Due to the separation barrier and a road that surrounds parts of Bethlehem constructed by Israel, Ismael is isolated from his land and must travel by a different road:

'Witness the discrimination through the two roads, one for the Palestinians and one for the Israelis... when we drive to our fields, we do not feel safe, there can be settlers, and they are armed.'

Ismael is reliant on rainwater for his trees because it's too far to bring water. Collecting rainwater on his own land is not allowed. Palestinian farmers have had materials destroyed when attempting to collect rainwater or build on their own land.

The water supply in the West Bank is allocated disproportionately to Israeli settlements and not to Palestinian communities.

'They take water from our lands; we only get water every two months. There is a shortage of water. The simplest rights are not cared for. The rights for any human being. Always we are nervous for our children, and find challenges to access land, water, and even breathing, we feel choked... Any Israeli is allowed to build; the Palestinians are not allowed to build on the land they own.'

Ismael feels very connected to the land, following the footsteps of his father and grandfather. His olive trees grow beneath an Israeli watchtower next to the separation barrier. He wants to keep bringing his children to the land so they feel a connection to it, even if it is dangerous. Despite the challenges, they still come to plant together.

'We need to challenge them, we are here, and we exist, maybe they will come in a couple of months, and they will destroy your grapes, almonds, but we exist and so we plant, we try...If you lose hope, you will get disappointed and you will not come back.'

Ismael points to the land outside of the separation barrier that used to be Palestinian land and is now taken by force for Israeli civilians to use.



'It was a very gradual process of understanding. There is a history to this country that is completely different than what I was told and the denial of this history is preventing us from reaching a solution that is peaceful, that is just.'

**Rachel Beitarie, Director of Zochrot,
Christian Aid partner in Israel**

Rachel grew up in Israel, not far from the Gaza strip. At university she began to hear different stories from those she'd heard before about the place she calls home.

Discovering the peace activism work of Zochrot was a life changing experience, as she began to discover more about the Nakba in 1948 (or 'Catastrophe' referring to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians in the war between Israel and neighbouring Arab states) and the occupation. Today Rachel leads Zochrot in the same work of education and activism.

'We take people to Palestinian places that were demolished, destroyed, displaced in 1948. Displaced people from these places come and guide us through the memories of the families, the communal lives and the history... it's really an invitation to reimagine the spaces where we live, reflect on that and figure out how we can act today to bring about a more just future.

...sometimes it's very uncomfortable. People sometimes don't necessarily know how to react to this new information. It's revolutionary in the way that it contradicts everything that we've been told.'

Part of Zochrot's work is to turn this discomfort into action for a just peace. People are encouraged for example to landmark former villages destroyed and built over by the Israeli state to build consciousness in their communities.

Since the 7 October Hamas attack on Israel and the war in Gaza, Zochrot continue to bring activists together to educate and build community.

'[we had] weekly gatherings, to process, to talk, to think of some actions... It was really a collective work of creating some texts that can help activists navigate difficult conversations, even with their families, with their friends... we really became a community that is learning together and acting together.'

These gatherings were the seed of ceasefire protests in Israel. Rachel, along with Zochrot and their activists want to see a just peace and for refugees to be able to return home as is their right under international law.



'It does mean dismantling a system that is based on putting different values on human lives and instead choosing equality and the possibility of living together... this transformation has happened in different parts of the world. I believe it can happen.'

Zochrot members leading a tour and marking a former Palestinian village.

Photo: Zochrot

Why us, why now?

The crisis in Gaza starting in October 2023 captured global attention. People around the world, appalled by Hamas's attacks in Israel, have watched in horror as the Israeli state's response has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions, and created a humanitarian crisis of unimaginable scale in Gaza. Many recognise this as a collective punishment by the Israeli state that will lead to more violence for generations to come.

Yet these events are the latest chapter in a long history of grave injustices. Whilst the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians have been shaped by collective loss, trauma and fear, the Israeli occupation, anti-Palestinian racism and an extreme imbalance of power mean that millions of Palestinians live their lives under oppression and in poverty.

We believe that a just peace is possible and that we all have a responsibility to act in ways that challenge the current and unsustainable status quo. Christian Aid is committed to joining with others to campaign tirelessly for a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

For many, this region is a holy land, and its history represents all that is best and worst in humanity. Mention of Israel and Palestine polarises people and communities, which for some prevents them getting involved or joining discussions about the situation. Fear of getting it wrong, causing offence or being confronted, causes some to turn away. But we must not do that.

We have a responsibility to help support those brave Palestinians and Israelis who campaign for an alternative existence based on dignity, equality and respect for all.

Christian Aid's work as an agency is dedicated to tackling poverty rooted in injustice. A just peace must serve Palestinians and Israelis equally. However, our work focuses more on Palestinians because they experience deep poverty driven by oppression and racism.

Key talking points

In the following pages we will unpack some of the barriers to a just peace and the conditions required to allow Israel and Palestine to forge their own shared peace.

You may find this summary of points useful:

- **There are no winners in the absence of a just peace. Both Palestinians and Israelis are hurt by ongoing violent conflict in the region.** Lives have been lost and destroyed in both communities, and fear for the future is felt across the region. Palestinians are neither free nor secure. Israelis are not secure. Only accountability can provide a solid foundation for freedom and security for all.
- **The occupation of the Palestinian territory has isolated and dispossessed Palestinians.** Israel's military occupation - including the building of illegal Israeli settlements, the demolition of Palestinian homes, and the restriction of movement - has resulted in poverty, insecurity and suffering for Palestinians.
- **A combination of damaging Israeli policies, weak Palestinian leadership and failed international accountability has perpetuated the conflict for decades.** International leaders have failed to hold all parties to account and have been overwhelmingly silent on the suffering of Palestinians across the region.
- **The UK has been complicit in the oppression of Palestinians for over 100 years,** from its former role as mandate power in Palestine, to support for Israel's impunity on the world stage, to arming Israel. As UK citizens, we are compelled to act.
- **Palestinians and Israelis both need a just peace,** that not only ends violence but upholds the rights of all people. It is up to Israelis and Palestinians to decide on what a political settlement for peace looks like. But to create the conditions for a just peace, the occupation must end and Palestinians must be treated as equals. Accountability must apply to all those who violate international law.

Barriers to peace

Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory live with the daily reality of poverty, insecurity and abuse. Israelis experience insecurity as a result of indiscriminate violence by armed groups.

The occupation of Palestinian land manifests in daily, grinding and often escalating violence, fueled by a lack of accountability. Here we unpack this and some of the other barriers to a just peace.

Settlements and annexation

Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) make up the occupied Palestinian territory. These have been occupied by Israel since 1967.

An occupying power legally must protect the civilian population in the areas under its control and must not transfer its own civilian population to the occupied territory. Israel does not uphold these legal responsibilities.

Settlements are Israeli residential towns, illegally constructed in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Over time the planning and expanding of settlements has forced Palestinian communities off their land making them homeless, and often jobless. These settlements are considered illegal under international law. They are connected by roads into the rest of Israel. Palestinians are generally not allowed to use these roads and infrastructure designed for settlements. This creates physical barriers to the movement of people and goods inside the West Bank and negatively impacts trade and jobs.

The Separation Barrier in the West Bank built in the name of security is another illegal Israeli construction, given that much of its route cuts through the occupied Palestinian territory. It takes yet more Palestinian land and destroys farming livelihoods.

Israeli and international businesses have long operated in or supported the settlement economy, for example trading in produce grown or manufactured in settlements.

Despite recognising settlements as illegal, governments including the UK continue to allow trade with them.

'I am scared every time I go through a checkpoint, but you cannot look nervous. If the soldier sees you're nervous it is dangerous'

Palestinian worshipper during Ramadan in Hebron, speaking to Christian Aid partner Ecumenical Accompanier Programme in Palestine and Israel.

Demolition

Thousands of Palestinian homes have been demolished by the Israeli state rendering people homeless and displaced.

In the West Bank, Palestinians are often forced to build homes without a permit because Israel makes it almost impossible for them to obtain consent for construction. Whilst over 100,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem live under threat of demolition orders, fines and displacement, illegal Israeli settlements receive substantial state funding for development. Many Palestinians who receive a demolition order destroy their own homes to avoid being charged demolition costs by the Israeli state.

Displacement

Since the Nakba in 1948, the Palestinian story has been dominated by displacement. To this day, about 6 million Palestinians are refugees in the occupied Palestinian territory and across the Middle East. They are extremely vulnerable and often denied the most basic rights, including in Lebanon, where their right to work is limited. Living in overcrowded conditions and facing routine hostility, these Palestinians have been denied the right to return to their homes.

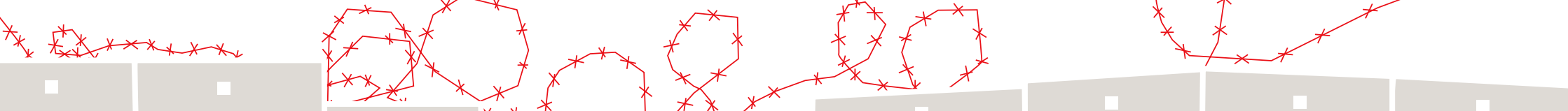
In 2023 alone, approximately 4,000 Palestinians were displaced across the West Bank due to policies implemented by the Government of Israel and extremist Israeli civilians (settlers), illegally in the area, committing acts of violence.

Inside Israel, unrecognised Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab are threatened with demolition to make way for new Jewish-only Israeli towns.

The Edkedek family purchased building rights in the 1990s in the neighborhood of Ras Al-'Amud, East Jerusalem. In 2018 they built two apartments on the roof of another family's home and a storage room in their yard. But before they were able to move into their new apartments, they received a demolition order from Israeli authorities...

...In 2019 Maamun Edkedek, 27, spent 8 days carefully demolishing his parent's apartment with labourers. On the eighth day, the city workers suddenly arrived with bulldozers and demolished Maamun's apartment and the storage room. All that was left was a pile of rubble.

Christian Aid Partner: B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories 2019



Restrictions on movement: checkpoints and blockade

Throughout the West Bank hundreds of checkpoints and concrete roadblocks restrict the day-to-day movement of Palestinians.

These measures, installed in the name of security, make it incredibly difficult for Palestinians to travel to work or school – or even go shopping. The West Bank can be ‘closed’, or travel restricted, at Israel’s discretion, as during the 2023-24 Gaza war. For those who can travel, it is deeply stressful, uncertain, and time-consuming.

Even prior to the 2023/24 war, Gaza has been largely sealed off to the outside world since 2007. The Israeli military occupies Gaza through an indefinite land, sea and air blockade. Palestinians do not have their own borders that they control. For years it has been extremely difficult to obtain a permit to leave or enter Gaza. Even requests for hospital treatment outside Gaza for sick and injured people were extremely difficult to secure.

The blockade caused deep poverty. Gaza was classed as a humanitarian crisis long before the war starting in 2023, with more than half the population unemployed and living in poverty. No one in Gaza could visit Jerusalem or the rest of the West Bank without approval from Israel, which was routinely withheld. These restrictions violate human rights laws and cause untold suffering. Many families have not seen loved ones for many years due to the blockade. Gaza has often been described as the world’s biggest open-air prison.

Violence and impunity

Indiscriminate violence against civilians has taken a heavy toll across Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

Every life taken is a tragedy, and there have been too many taken in the last 7 decades – Palestinian and Israeli.

The violence disproportionately affects Palestinians through the everyday enforcement of the occupation, including regular raids on homes and arrests by Israeli forces. In the West Bank Palestinian farmers are regularly assaulted by Israeli settlers on Palestinian land.

Palestinians detained by Israel in the West Bank are processed by military courts, whereas Israeli settlers in the same territory can be referred to civilian courts where they have civilian legal protection. Numbers of Palestinians held indefinitely without charge fluctuate during times of escalating violence.

The war in Gaza starting in 2023 has seen the slaughter of tens of thousands of Palestinians, and plunged people into even greater poverty. Surviving Palestinians, often cut off from aid, have faced starvation and disease, while many have sustained lifelong injuries.

Whilst many more Palestinians have been killed, Israelis have also faced violence. Palestinians inside and outside the occupied territory have carried out stabbings, shootings, hostage taking and, historically, suicide bombings. The attack on 7 October 2023 has been by far the most horrific, taking more than 1,000 Israeli lives and hundreds of hostages.

International law, the body of law that was established after World War Two to protect civilians in war, is being undermined in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. This not only impacts Israelis and Palestinians, but anyone affected by violent conflict elsewhere.

Failed leadership

Leadership failings across Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory - and around the world - perpetuate the violence, poverty and inequality of the region.

Few states formally recognise the legitimacy of Israel's presence in the occupied territory, but only a few have tried to hold it to account.

Palestinians are forced to contend with the failings of their own leadership, who have not held elections since 2006. Frequently ineffective and unaccountable Palestinian administrations have too often failed in their duty to protect civilian life.

Israeli policies are not creating the security that Israeli citizens need, and lead to destructive violations of human rights for Palestinians.

Few of the actions taken by Israeli or Palestinian political leaders have lessened the level of existential dread experienced by both communities.

UK Complicity

We must reckon with the UK's complicity in the historic and present suffering in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

Britain was given a mandate of power in Palestine in the early 20th Century through the League of Nations and supported the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, while effectively ignoring the political rights of the Palestinian Arab population.

Despite successive UK Governments stating support for a two-state solution, to this day the UK has not officially recognised a state of Palestine.

For decades, while the displacement and oppression of Palestinians has been clear, the UK has failed to hold Israel to account. Whilst UK leaders have called on Israel to halt settlement construction, they have not halted trade with companies operating within or profiting from the occupation.

During the recent war on Gaza starting 2023, the UK has broadly backed Israel's military actions in the name of self-defense, continued to supply arms and failed to call out violations of international law.

The UK Government repeatedly delayed voting for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza at the United Nations Security Council costing innocent lives.

Time and again the UK could have acted in the interest of a just peace. Instead, it has repeatedly backed the unjust actions of the Israeli state, often at the expense of the rights of Palestinians.

The path to peace

Palestinians and Israelis need a just peace. That means not only a future free from bloodshed, but one that deals with the root causes and upholds the rights and dignity of all. This requires a political settlement rooted in international law and it is for Palestinians and Israelis to decide what that should look like. But Christian Aid believes that process can only truly start if some key steps are taken first.

We've outlined these steps below; **the UK must play its part in these wherever it can.**

Stop the violence

Ending the violence is not sufficient to build peace, but it's an essential first step. Following the 2023/24 war in Gaza, and ongoing human rights violations across Israel and the occupied territory, the UK must step up its efforts to stop the bloodshed. This must, in the first instance, include suspending arms sales to Israel.

Stop the settlements

The Israeli government must stop settlement construction on occupied Palestinian land. The UK must end decades of condemnation without consequence for illegal Israeli actions in the occupied Palestinian territory. There should be an immediate ban on all trade with businesses profiting from illegal settlements.

Free and fair elections

It is essential that Palestinians have a say in their political system and can hold their leaders to account through elections. Poor governance and alleged corruption by Palestinian leaders have added to Palestinian suffering.

Recognise Palestine

The UK must recognise the state of Palestine as they have Israel and give meaning to equality. Palestine must be welcomed as other nations from the international community have been, with all the responsibilities and legitimacy that comes with recognition.

Ensure accountability

All those who target innocent civilians and break international law must be held to account using the international institutions established for that purpose. The UK can play a key role in holding parties to account for human rights abuses. It must:

- hold all parties to account for violations of international law and end support for Israeli impunity.
- back the power of international courts (e.g. the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice).
- use its vote on of the United Nations Security Council to halt the violence.

End the blockade of Gaza

Israel must lift restrictions both on the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza. The UK must apply diplomatic pressure to Israel to lift the blockade and ensure aid and commercial goods reach those in need without obstruction.

Confront racism in all its forms

The oppression of Palestinians has long been enabled by a deep and historic racism. Jewish Israelis hold a collective memory of deadly antisemitism in Europe and beyond, mirrored in modern day antisemitism. Tragically, in response to the Hamas attacks and Israel's war on Gaza starting in 2023, the UK (like many other countries) has seen an explosion of anti-Palestinian racism, islamophobia and antisemitism.

We must demonstrate active allyship to all those who face racist oppression, both in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and at home.



Our calling

Our Christian calling to the work of justice can be heard time and time again as we search the scriptures. But seeking justice in the face of decades of deep unresolved conflict can feel overwhelming.

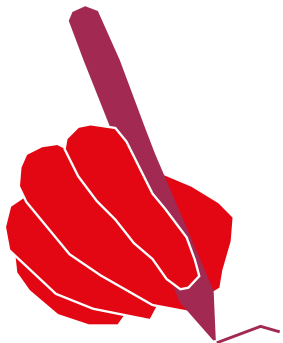
What can we possibly do with such a calling?

How can we stand with people in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory when their experience is so far from our own day to day lives?

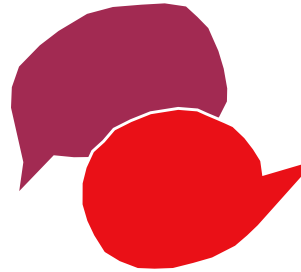
We must remember that a different future is possible, and our faith compels us to help build it.



- Leaning closer to the scriptures that call us to act justly, we are also reminded that we are not left alone, we are invited to walk with God in **our action for the common good** (Micah 6:8).



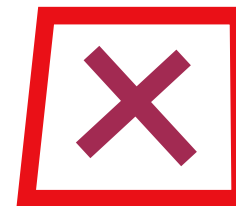
- Rather than being overwhelmed with a bigger picture, it's important to focus ourselves on **what is within our power** to do. We all have power that we can exercise in solidarity with those living with the injustice of war and oppression.



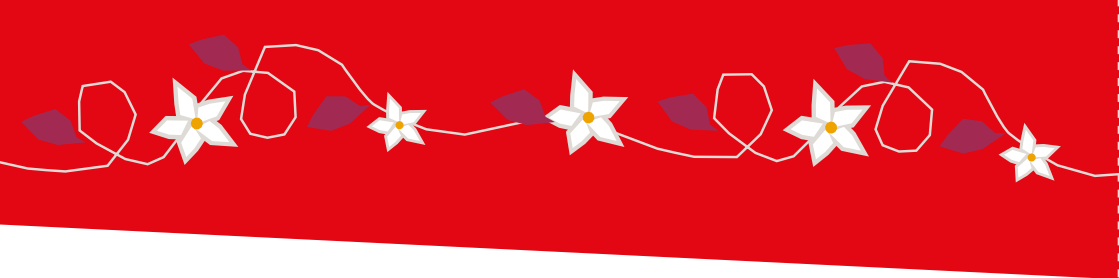
- As members of churches and wider communities, we have the **power to talk** to those we know about what is happening in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, we hope this booklet will help you to do that.



- We can overcome silence with honest, respectful conversations that challenge perceptions and **build solidarity in prayer and action for a just peace.**



- Poverty is political. As UK citizens we can confront the complicity of our leaders. We all have a direct link to our local politicians and the **power to ask them to act for peace on our behalf in their seats of power.**



There are many ways you can **use what you have to:**



take action...



pray...



and give...

...for a just peace

You can find more information about how you can do this
by visiting the Christian Aid website:

caid.org.uk/justpeace



**‘Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.’**

Matthew 5:9

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Prayer of the Peacemaker

God of Justice and Peace,

Make us peacemakers.

Give us courage to bear witness to uncomfortable truths,
Help us when our eyes want to look away
from destruction and death.

Give us courage to speak where there is silence,
To name complicity, injustice and poverty.

Make us dissatisfied by shrugging off the ‘complicated’,
Keep us curious to listen and understand.

Help us hold together Palestinian and Israeli,
As we stand in solidarity against oppression.

Plant in us persistence in seeking a just peace,
Let us not grow weary in our petition and our prayer.
Give strength and wisdom to all who strive for peace,
on both sides of checkpoints and blockade.

God of Justice and Peace,

Make us peacemakers,

Amen

(cut along dashed line and display the last page as a visual reminder to act and pray for a just peace)



**Each and every
Palestinian,
we hope to taste
our freedom,
help us,
we ask you to
stand with us
and share
our example
with the
international
community.**

Ismael Joudeh Amad Speih,
Al Hada town, Bethlehem,
West Bank



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