



FROM THE ANGLICAN ARCHBISHOP OF CAPE TOWN

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A Pastoral Letter on the tragic situation in Palestine and Israel

My dear Sisters and Brothers

In September 2019, our Provincial Synod passed a resolution expressing our strong support for justice for the Palestinian people. We did not do this lightly: our own experiences and the way the Christian faith was manipulated in the service of apartheid meant that we could not keep silent in the face of similar developments elsewhere.

Our resolution was a cry from the heart aimed at avoiding new outbreaks of violence such as that we have seen recently in the Holy Land. The indiscriminate attacks on whole communities which we saw are to be condemned in the strongest of terms, particularly when aimed at the blockaded territory of Gaza, which has taken on the nature of a huge open-air prison.

The rise in tensions which lay behind the recent violence is partly attributable to attempts to evict Palestinian families from their homes in a largely Palestinian neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and to replace them with Jewish settlers. It shocks the conscience to learn that Israeli law gives Jewish people the right to return to property said to have belonged to them before the state was established in 1948, but that Palestinians have no such right.

The dispute over land goes to the heart of the conflict: because Israel has been declared a homeland for the Jewish people, those of Jewish descent who have no connection to the land other than that biblical Israel was the historic home of their faith have the right to settle there. Yet Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes in 1948 have no right to return to their land and properties. And in recent years, the invasion of Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967 by Jewish settlers renders any “two-state solution” even less viable than our Bantustans were.

The current state of affairs is unjust and evil. We therefore call for an arms embargo to be placed on all fighting forces in the region, just as there was a United Nations arms embargo on South Africa. We also call for other pressure, including sanctions, to be imposed to bring all the parties around a conference table to negotiate a just peace.

God must be weeping when God sees what is happening in the place where Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again. The “Holy Basin” should be a place where God’s reconciliation is showcased, but the current imbalance of power means that the Palestinians are suffering disproportionately.

We pray for those working for change. We pray for citizens across the world as they rise up in protest. We pray for a united response from across the world and we pray that the Holy Spirit will intervene and unite us across all barriers so that what happens in the Holy Land will surprise us and that we will glorify God because of it. It is possible. We must not lose hope. We must not become cynical. Let us hold onto faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is always love.

May God bless you during Trinitytide.

†† Thabo Cape Town

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