

World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel 2018

“Youth and Children: Raising Hope and Making Change”

Background:

During this week which includes the International Day of Prayer for Peace on 21 September, church organizations, congregations, and people of faith are encouraged to bear a common witness by participating in worship services, educational events, and acts of support in favour of peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians.

Date:

16 – 23 September 2018

Theme:

The status of children and youth in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict: From Victims to Peacemakers.

“Be the winds of change for peace”

- Youth as perpetrators of violent conflict
- Youth as victims in violent conflict
- Youth as an asset in peace processes
- Youth as peace builders
- Youth as agents of change

Organizers:

The World Council of Churches invites member churches, faith-based communities, and civil society organizations around the world to join together for a week of prayer for just peace for all in Palestine and Israel. Congregations and individuals around the globe who share the hope of justice shall unite during the week to take peaceful actions, together, to create a common international public witness.

Challenges facing youth and children in the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict:

- Access to school: In Palestine, the obstacles to receiving an education are numerous. Large numbers of Palestinian children living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem experience serious harassment and hurdles on their way to and from school as well as in school yards and classrooms. The World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel accompaniers - in cooperation with UNICEF - have witnessed many attacks over the past years and indicated that attacks are becoming more frequent. Delays at checkpoints, military presence, settler attacks, treacherous roads, closed military zones, demolition orders and violent clashes are among the obstacles that children face. As the security situation in many parts of Palestine continues to deteriorate, the protection of schools, students and their right to education needs to be respected and prioritised.
- Child arrest and detention: Around 500-700 Palestinian children are arrested, detained and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system each year. Under military law, minors as young as 12 can be arrested, most for stone-throwing, which is considered a "security offence". Many of the accused are arrested in night raids by armed soldiers and held in detention pending prosecution in military courts. While children have the right to a lawyer under the same military order, few actually get one.
- Access to employment: According to several studies done on the labour market and employment policies in Palestine by the European Training Foundation, one of the major characteristics of the Palestinian labour market is the presence of a very young population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with a low labour force participation rate. A major challenge is the inability of the labour market to absorb new entrants due to insufficient investment and high political risk. Restrictions on movement that limit access to imports and international markets contributed to the low employment in the tradable sectors. Unemployment among young people (ages 15–24 years) in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is very high, but is much higher in the latter, with average rates of 38.8% and 52%, respectively.
- Fear and trauma: the continuing situation of violence and conflict in Palestine and Israel has a devastating effect on children who are experiencing high rates of nightmares and are showing increasing signs of psychosocial deterioration as a result of the situation. Principals from 20 schools in Gaza interviewed by the Norwegian Refugee Council in May 2018 reported a rise in symptoms of post-traumatic stress in children, including fears, anxiety, stress and nightmares. School principals attributed high levels of post-traumatic stress and low concentration at school to the violent response to the recent demonstrations. The principals ranked increased psychosocial support in schools as their top need right now.

Hopes and Opportunities for youth as Peacemakers:

Young people and children see their present lives and their future shaped by the current Israeli/Palestinian conflict. They may be separated from their families, orphaned, forced into child labour, heading households, be detained, etc. However the situation can be changed and young people can themselves *shape* their future, *change* the status of the conflict and *build* peace. They can choose a different path, a different journey, a just community for all.

- Healing and reconciliation:

The Bible is full of stories of reconciliation. They illustrate the power of reconciling attitudes of people who try to solve strife, enmity, and experiences or perceptions of injustice through negotiations, repentance, forgiveness, and searching for a common basis and a shared future. Similarly in the New Testament, reconciliation looks at a transformation of the present, a very deep-rooted renewal. The "peace" which Paul speaks about is first and foremost peace with God (Romans 5:1,11). It is also in a prominent way the transformation of human relationships and the building of a community. Youth and children are agents of this God-given power of transformation, God-given gift of peace. They can transform human relationships and heal their communities on the basis of justice. Justice is the key for peace.

- Culture and traditions: Lasting peace is not only firmly rooted in faith and spiritual traditions, but also closely linked to culture understood in its spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional dimensions and encompassing diverse value systems, traditions and beliefs. According to UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, "Culture informs and influences people's relation to conflicts, and reconciliation in a distinct, but direct manner determines and creates paths for lasting conflict resolution and healing." Culture and heritage are not about stones and buildings; they are about identities and belongings. They carry values from the past that are important for the societies today and tomorrow. Culture and heritage in Palestine and Israel are what can bring young people together around a common responsibility for exploring, protecting and promoting what preserves their identity.
- Advancing peace through social justice: Peace is not the *absence of violence* or the *absence of the fear of violence*. Peace can be associated with a multitude of factors and phenomena that reinforce one another, including gender equality, justice, relevant education and employment opportunities, human rights protection, political inclusion, etc. Promoting social justice is an important contribution towards sustainable peace. Involving young people from different faith and ethnic groups in such processes especially on the leadership level establishes a basis for social cohesion and breaks several barriers at the grassroots level.

Advocacy:

- WCC policy on Palestine and Israel 1948-2016 (summary):
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness/peace-building-cf/wcc-policy-on-palestine-and-israel-1948-2016-summary>
- WCC decries violence on Israel-Palestinian border:
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-decries-violence-on-israel-palestinian-border>
- WCC calls for just peace and an end to impunity in the Holy Land:
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-calls-for-just-peace-and-an-end-to-impunity-in-the-holy-land>
- Al-Azhar Al-Sharif International Conference on Supporting Jerusalem:
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/speeches/al-azhar-al-sharif-international-conference-on-supporting-jerusalem>

Prayers:

We ask the Lord, O Lord, have mercy on us ...

O Lord, Jesus Christ our God, our Savior. You have accepted to be incarnated in this holy land. You came into this world to drag it out of darkness into light. You have suffered pain, death, the cross, burial, and resurrection for our sake.

We pray asking you to have mercy on us, to forgive our sins and mistakes and protect the deep-rooted Christian presence in our country, as we became few in numbers because of migration, but the remaining few are not a minority, and we pray that the Christians in our country be salt and yeast for this land, and a source of good and blessing in this holy spot of the world.

We ask you, O Lord, to have mercy on our Palestinian people, our youth and our children in particular, as this people suffered many grievances. Innocent people are being killed, our youth, our children are being targeted. And more wounded and disabled people are suffering from pain, distress and grief.

We are imploring You to bestow Your mercy from heaven on each individual suffering from sadness, grief and sorrow. We pray all together for the sake of the families of martyrs and prisoners; we pray for our Palestinian people and for the sake of the achievement of justice and genuine peace in this land.

We are longing for the achievement of justice in this land whose people suffered a lot, we strongly yearn for peace in this land in which peace was repressed.

We pray and ask you O Lord of sacrifice and Salvation to bestow your justice on us in order to grant the Palestinian people security, peace and stability far away from the language of violence, murdering and death.

We ask you, O Lord, for the sake of this Orient which is suffering from wars, terrorism, the culture of killing and violence, to give peace to the peoples of Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen which suffered from destruction, chaos and despair.

We pray and ask you O Lord to grant Your Mercy to the victims of terrorism in our region, who are the Christians and all citizens; we pray in order to achieve the culture of dialogue, love, brotherhood and reconciliation far away from the language of wars, killing and violence. Enough chaos, wars and injustices and it is time for our peoples to live in Peace in this tortured Orient.

O Lord, we are in front of you enduring our sufferings, sorrow, tears of our mothers, and injuries of our youth, so grant us Your Mercy, protect our country and guide all of us to do good deeds and disseminate the values of love, compassion and brotherhood among mankind.

Notice: This prayer is written and presented by His Highness Atallah Hanna Archbishop of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Lord Jesus Christ, with heavy, tired, and burdened hearts we come to you; give us rest and teach us to be like you and carry your light yoke. Break through the darkness of our situation of injustice and war with your radiant light, so our children may see the light of life, and experience the power of Love that overcomes vengeance, hatred, fear, and death.

Lord, you came so that we may have life and have it in abundance; we ask you to open our eyes and hearts in order to experience true life. We ask you to lead us in the paths of abundant life so that we can teach our children and give them the example true life that we learn from you.

Lord, you said that the truth will set us free, may your truth guide us out of the bondage of fear, hatred, and extremism so that our children can enjoy life in the land that you blessed with your presence. May your truth ground us and our children in true hope that is established with faith and built with love casting away all fears that hinder us from meeting and accepting the other.

Lord you blessed the children, and said “to them is the kingdom of heavens” we ask you that our children may experience your blessing in their daily lives. May they grow up in peace without fear, may their dreams come true without the terror of checkpoints, prisons, and guns.

Lord we ask you to grace our children with peaceful and joyful childhood. We ask you to open the eyes of politicians and decision makers so that they can respect, admire, and protect the lives of our children against all struggles and wars.

Notice: This prayer is written and presented Pastor Imad Hadad pastor of Lutheran church of hope Ramallah

Lord Jesus, when you walked the streets of Palestine, you knew what it was like to live under occupation. You cared for soldier and civilian alike. You walked the extra mile in the example you gave of love in action, even across the divisions of your time. We pray today for the people of the Holy Land, Israeli and Palestinian, Jew, Muslim, Druze and Christian. In this rich and diverse population there is so much fear, so much suspicion, so much hatred, so much injustice, so much history and so much division. Inspire your people today with that same love you showed so long ago and that same quest for justice - that we may overcome the failings of the past and enable a new community to grow where all the children of Abraham may live in Peace with one another, in mutual respect. May all the people of this land turn away from violence and hatred, learn anew of how to respect each other and find that true Shalom where every person is valued, every right respected and every dream cherished. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who proclaimed blessed are the peacemakers, in every age.

Amen.

Notice: This prayer is written and presented by Revd John C Howard-Norman West Pennine Moors Circuit of the Methodist Church Jerusalem