



***** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE *****

Pax Christi International acknowledges 71 years of the Nakba

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Brussels – Today, Palestinians throughout the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, Israel and the diaspora mark seventy-one years since the *Nakba* (Arabic for "The Catastrophe"). It marks the deliberate destruction of over 400 Palestinian towns and villages and the planned forced exodus of more than 750,000 men, women and children from their ancestral homes, between 1947 and 1948, to make way for the State of Israel. We deeply regret that the Israeli government has made it unlawful for the Nakba to be recognised in Israel, denying many of its citizens the right to acknowledge an historic event which is pivotal to the Palestinian narrative.¹

In November 1947 the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181 which called for the partition of Mandatory Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. In December 1948 the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 194 providing Palestinians with the right of return or compensation. Although this resolution has been reaffirmed by the UN more than 135 times and subsequent UN resolutions have reinforced it—including UN resolutions 393, 2452 and 3236—none of the resolutions have been implemented, nor has the State of Israel been held to account for denying Palestinians the right of return that is enshrined in them.

On 30 March 2018, the Great March of Return demonstrations refocused the world's attention on this issue as thousands of Palestinians confined within the Gaza Strip demanded an end to the eleven-year Israeli blockade of Gaza and their right to return to their family homes. During the year since then, 195 Palestinians—including well-identified medics, journalists and 41 children—have been killed and another 29,000 people injured.²

The Nakba is not simply an historic event seared into their national history and collective memory. It is an ongoing catastrophe for Palestinians who continue to experience land confiscation to make way for illegal Israeli settlement expansion, home demolitions, destruction of their ancient olive orchards, and the denial of their right of return. We are approaching the fifth generation of Palestinians to be born as either displaced refugees, stateless persons living under 52 years of Israeli military occupation, prisoners of a land, sea and air blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt, or treated as second-class citizens of Israel.

¹ The 2011 "Nakba Law" authorizes Israel's finance minister to revoke funding from institutions that reject Israel's character as a "Jewish state" or mark the country's Independence Day as a day of mourning.

² UNWRA, 'Gaza's great march of return one year on: impact on Palestine refugees and UNWRA services', 2019, at: https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/gaza_gmr_one_year_on_report_eng_final.pdf.

Pax Christi International is especially concerned for the well-being of the 5.4 million registered refugees in the Occupied Territories, including those in East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, and those in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. The devastating impact of the recent elimination of all aid to Palestinians by the Trump administration—including U.S. funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)—cannot be overstated. The agency is confronted with an increased demand for services as the humanitarian situation deteriorates and the human rights of refugees continue to be violated.³

“When assistance to UNRWA is cut, this has a real impact on the youth who constitute the majority of people in the three refugee camps in Bethlehem,” explained Rania Giacaman Murra, Director of the Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem. “As a result of the cuts, these young people have less access to education, health, safe places and job opportunities. Many of those with whom we work chose the cuts to UNRWA as a topic for our youth advocacy project. They also say that the international community should uphold its responsibility toward the Palestinian right of return.”

The EU and several countries responded to the urgent need to close UNRWA’s unexpected funding gap. However, UNWRA still had to cut several critical programs and more are in jeopardy. Until all Palestinians are free to exercise their full potential in freedom and dignity, adequate resources must be substantially increased and secured.

Our peace movement calls on the international community to act today to ensure that funding for necessary humanitarian services is guaranteed and to call for more robust steps to be taken towards a peace and reconciliation process that recognises and protects the human dignity and rights of Palestinians and Israelis as equals. We believe that this can only be accomplished with a steadfast commitment to abide by international law and UN resolutions.

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³ UN News, ‘Palestine refugee crisis ‘expanding’; leaving highest number at risk this century across Gaza’, 29 January 2019, at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/01/1031562>.