



Pax Christi International urges the international community to commemorate and reflect with Palestinians on the 70th Anniversary of the Nakba

15 May 2018, Brussels

Pax Christi International recognises the 70th anniversary of two historic events this year: the establishment of the State of Israel and the *Nakba* (Arabic for “catastrophe”), the expulsion of more than 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and the destruction of over 400 Palestinian towns and villages to make way for the new state.¹ These two events are forever interconnected. Pax Christi members and partners will once again stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people, especially those who after seven decades remain refugees, as they mark this solemn anniversary of the Nakba on 15 May 2018.

The Nakba has resulted in the longest refugee crisis in modern history. Prevented by Israel from returning to their homes, generations of Palestinians are refugees living in camps in the occupied territories and Gaza. They find themselves residing just a few miles from their homes, some still holding on to their keys. Millions of other Palestinians live in the diaspora. They share the painful memory of being uprooted from their homes and a stalwart determination to exercise their rights. UN resolution 194², and subsequent UN resolutions, confirm Palestinian refugees’ right of return and the right to compensation for those not returning for loss and damage to their property. None of these resolutions have been respected.

The Palestinians’ demand that these basic rights be realised is the driving force behind the Great March of Return which began in Gaza on 30 March 2018 and will culminate in the commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Nakba on 15 May 2018. More than 1.8 million Palestinians, most of whom are refugees, descendants of families displaced by the events of 1947-1948, live within the confines of Gaza. The 10-year Israeli air, sea and land blockade of this tiny enclave has resulted in dire living conditions for Palestinians and a warning by the UN that if current conditions continue, Gaza will be uninhabitable by the year 2020.³

¹ Institute for Middle East Understanding, “Quick Facts: The Palestinian Nakba”, 13 May 2015, online available at: <https://imeu.org/article/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba>.

² UN resolution 194 is available on this website: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/043/65/IMG/NR004365.pdf?OpenElement>.

³ UNWRA, “Gaza in 2020: A liveable place?”, 28 August 2012, online available at: <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/gaza-2020-liveable-place>.

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary, Palestinians were galvanised to call for nonviolent demonstrations against the blockade of Gaza and demand their lawful right to return to their homes and/or to receive compensation. Nonviolent demonstrations have been met with excessive force by the Israeli military using live ammunition. We strongly condemn the targeting of unarmed civilians involved in the marches.⁴ To date, more than 39 people have been killed and hundreds have been wounded⁵, including children and members of the press. Our peace movement remains steadfast in its belief that nonviolent protest is a legitimate right which should be recognised and protected by the international community.

As this historic year also marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is more urgent than ever that the rights of all Palestinians are upheld. Major human rights concerns and recommendations were addressed to Israel during the UN Universal Periodic Review meeting in January 2018, including on compliance with Palestinian refugees' rights.⁶ Since the March of Return started, the situation has become worse. On 27 April 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called on Israel to ensure that the security forces do not resort to the use of excessive force and also called for those responsible to be held accountable.⁷

As 70 long years have passed, the Palestinian narrative of the Nakba has too often been denied and the rights of the Palestinian refugees have too often not been respected. The traumatic events of the Nakba have cast a devastating shadow over the health and well-being of the Palestinian people. For the youngest generation, which has known only military occupation, the absence of self-determination is tantamount to a negation of their future. Our peace movement honours the strong commitment of the Palestinians to reclaim the tragic events of 1948 as a defining experience that must be acknowledged.

⁴ See also our statement of 5 April 2018 on vicious and violent suppression of peaceful protest in Gaza:

<https://www.paxchristi.net/news/statement-pax-christi-international-condemns-vicious-and-violent-suppression-peaceful-protest>.

⁵ On 24 April 2018, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 39 Palestinians have been killed and 5,511 were wounded in the mass protests along the border fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel since March 30, see:

<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-snapshot-mass-casualties-context-demonstrations-gaza-strip-0>.

⁶ Human Rights Council, "Draft report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review", A/HRC/WG.6/29/L.12, 25 January 2018, online available at: https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/israel/session_29_-_january_2018/a_hrc_wg.6_29_l.12.pdf. With regard the rights of Palestinian refugees, it is of deep concern that the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is in financial turmoil due to a lack of funding from governments.

⁷ OCHA, 'Three Palestinians killed and hundreds injured in Gaza during continuing demonstrations along the fence with Israel', 27 April 2018, online available at: <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/three-palestinians-killed-and-hundreds-injured-gaza-during-continuing-demonstrations-along>.

Pax Christi International calls on the international community to:

- Recognise the Nakba and the right of return and/or compensation for Palestinian refugees as a prerequisite for a just and fair Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, for which increased commitment from the international community is urgently necessary;
- Acknowledge that Palestinians have the right to nonviolent, peaceful protest, to look for practical ways to support them and to endorse the UN call for an independent inquiry on the use of any excessive force against unarmed civilians;
- Insist that all Palestinians are afforded their human rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, and other human rights treaties and instruments, and that violations of these rights are condemned and independently investigated.

Pax Christi International is a Catholic peace movement with 120 member organisations worldwide promoting peace, respect for human rights, justice and reconciliation. The call for a renewed Israel-Palestine peace process is one of our advocacy priorities.