



Pax Scotia

Issue 61

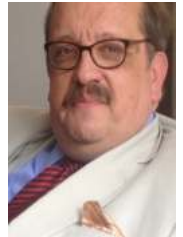
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Genocide: A Personal Reflection



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I have had an unfortunate series of moments in life in which I have been amid violence and war, but genocide as violence is the intended annihilation of another group. In the 1970s, the military dictatorships detained and tortured groups that were challenging their plans of annihilation; in the late 1980s, the Isaaq clan of Somaliland faced annihilation by other clans; in 1994 the Rwandese killing machine managed to be as effective as the Nazis and killed one million Tutsis and government opponents in three months.

In all those examples, children were to be killed first because they constituted the future of a group, thus in the Yazidi genocide of August 2014, children were killed immediately.

First, we must accept that human beings have the capacity to kill others. Secondly, we must reject killing, violence and genocide. Thirdly, self-pity is never the response but our actions swift and sustained might save lives so that a letter to governments from voters, a prayer for peace and deliverance and a hymn sung in front of nuclear weapons have a substantial value to recover humanity and to save lives.

Three times a day we must speak to somebody else about those facing genocide.

I recall words by Pope Francis before his dangerous journey to Iraq in 2019, when he asked me to go independently to the north and greet the frightened Christians before his arrival. He said: "Tell them to

resist, to resist, to resist, hatred and despair; tell them I am coming to greet them in the name of Jesus, in the name of his disciples."

And this is our attitude when genocide is clearly happening. The "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" provides characteristics of what constitutes a genocide. Among them: Deliberately inflicting conditions calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction. This is the characteristic that brings our sorrow, our solidarity and our hope now when the Israeli assault on Gaza City started. We must resist and condemn every atrocity, we must love every victim, every day, every hour, every minute, until our prayers, our love and our resistance make the difference.

Justice must prevail and the two-state solution must be implemented: we must resist despair, comfort and self-pity and act every day in peace and solidarity with victims, including those who need to be treated in our hospitals. Our hands must remain lifted for those who now are suffering and are being annihilated.

Thus, I remember one moment during my captivity when electricity had passed through our bodies, and we were helping others who were in bad shape: a disciple of Jesus pointed to a make-shift small cross on the ground made with one leaf, and he pointed to the leaf and told me "He suffered and died", thus, "we will resist and bring peace to this camp."

In this moment in which hope is in short supply, let's resist because as the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem has told us, Jesus is walking in Gaza - and we support him from Scotland every day, every hour, every minute!

Mario I Aguilar



Anupama Ranawana is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Durham. She is a Pax Christi Scotland member and joined us recently on a pro-Palestine march in Edinburgh.



Protesting in precarious times: A Personal View

Dianne Abbott stood up forty-six times in the House of Commons to ask a question, and forty-six times she was denied. To capture this deliberate silencing of a Black female MP, one of the plays in the anthology *Cutting the Tighrope* had several women of colour stand up forty-six times. We all had different statements to read out, from “Why does whiteness hate us?”, to “I have a question.”

I was privileged to be one of these women, and, when I stood up to ask my question, “Where do I go to get answers to the questions I have?” I was overcome with a wave of anger and sadness. In that moment I felt so strongly the precarity and helplessness of the increasing authoritarian situation in the United Kingdom.

Where can we go, when the government only wishes to be hostile to anyone who does not conform to its image of what Great Britain is? When righteous anger is seen as dangerous and violent?

In the last decade or so, with authoritarian governments gaining power in many parts of the world, civil society reach and the ability for anyone to assemble in protest has been greatly reduced. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, many

governments used the necessary restrictions on movement to bring in laws and regulations that further undermined civic freedoms.

The United Kingdom is no stranger to this trend. Indeed, in 2021 and 2023, when I was conducting some research for Christian Aid on autocratic states, we were obliged to add a short case study on the United Kingdom due to increased restrictions on the right to protest, and high levels of state surveillance.

As of 2025, the Civicus Monitor classes the United Kingdom as a country in which civic space is “obstructed”. This classification is due to increasing restrictions on civic freedoms, excessive force being used by the state, record sentences being handed out to nonviolent activists, and, especially in 2024-2025, restrictive laws that target pro-Palestine protestors.

Taking on any act of protest then, in the United Kingdom, can feel particularly precarious. This is especially the case for any pro-Palestinian activism, with the government having now proscribed the nonviolent direct action group Palestine Action as a terrorist group. And yet, as a Christian committed to social justice, and one who bills herself as a liberation theologian, there is no choice but to “theologise with my feet” - that is, to join in with different protest actions as part of my faithful

actions as part of my faithful calling.

It is something that can feel a little bit dangerous, not only because being pro-Palestinian is to take on a particular label, but also because I am an immigrant to the United Kingdom. Under both the Tories and Labour government, hostile environment policies have only got more cruel, making it easy for the government to revoke even indefinite leave to remain or citizenship if you are “not born here”. And, even if born here, if you are from a diasporic community, as the Windrush generation has found, you can still find yourself stateless.

Yet, even with these dangers in front of us, how can we turn our faces away from the acute suffering of our brothers and sisters in Palestine, Sudan, Congo? This suffering is directly caused by the imperial logics of the global economy and increased and often unchecked militarization.

For me, the answer is, as always, found when I look to the Cross. After all, the Cross is one of the most exemplary protest symbols. Christ stood up to empire and was executed, on this Cross, as a political prisoner. From the Cross, we are called to resistance.

Anupama Ranawana



Ann Farr is a retired teacher; a member of Pax Christi International Working Group for a Just Peace in the Holy Land; a former board member of Pax Christi International; former chair and executive member of Pax Christi England and Wales; and co-writer of Kairos Britain.

Ann and Pax Christi Scotland chair Marian Pallister attended the monthly online meeting of the Working Group for a Just Peace in the Holy Land on August 18. It was a heart-rending encounter with friends in Palestine as the situation worsened.

The plea from Palestine:

'Keep praying for peace'



Ann Farr

On Friday August 22, when Pope Leo called us to prayer and fasting for an end to conflict. we found ourselves steeped in news from Gaza and the Israeli occupied West Bank that was full of inhumanity that continues to shock us.

It began as I listened to Radio 4, where Liz Alcock, Medical Aid for Palestine's Head of Humanitarian Protection, said that the south of Gaza, with its 1.2 million Palestinians, is expecting a further influx of one million, forcibly removed from the north due to Israel's evacuation orders, prior to its military occupation of Gaza City. Already the south is overcrowded with displaced people with no infrastructure to support them. The overcrowding, lack of clean water, food, shelter, medical and hygiene resources means that infectious and preventable diseases are taking hold, and the medical staff are working in appalling conditions, at 300 per cent capacity.

There is nowhere safe in Gaza.

And on that Friday of prayer and fasting, the UN declared that there is famine in Gaza. A famine that could have been prevented if the Aid that is stacked up at the borders had not been systematically blocked by Israel. A 21st century famine watched over by drones and the most advanced military technology in history. One that is openly promoted by some Israeli leaders as a weapon of war.

We are invited to read the irrefutable testimony, in sorrow and in anger, not as words and numbers but as names and lives.

On that Friday, Fr Gabriel Romanelli, parish priest of Holy Family Roman Catholic Community in Gaza City, described the whole of the Gaza Strip as being very dangerous; they could hear the bombing 400/500 metres away. He said, 'Unfortunately the war is not only continuing but entering a new and very terrible phase. The

needs of the entire civilian population of Gaza are acute.' The parish is sheltering 450 refugees and cares for a number of their frail elderly and disabled community.

Fr Gabriel asks that we keep praying for peace.

After the recent military attack on the parish, Patriarch Pizzaballa visited and on his return said, 'We have returned from Gaza with broken hearts. But also encouraged by the testimony of many people we met... Christ is not absent from Gaza. He is here – crucified in the wounded, buried under the rubble and yet present in every hand extended to the suffering. He appeals to us and all the international community to do what is right, in a way that restores human dignity. He says it is time to end this nonsense, end the war and put the common good of people as the top priority.

Patriarch Pizzaballa added, 'Let us not turn peace into a slogan, while war remains the daily bread of the poor.'

As we in Pax Christi meet with and listen to the reports of our friends and partners in Palestine, we continue to plead that everyone in positions of leadership and power will condemn the injustices and act so that justice will be done – as God intends.

We should not have to hear our friend Usama Nicola in the West Bank (usually a man who encourages us to hope) say 'We are broken', as we did on August 18.

And so we invite everyone to join us in taking whatever action is possible to achieve a Just Peace for everyone.

Ann Farr

Our website

Blogs, podcasts, book projects, past and future events – these are all on our Pax Christi Scotland website. All newsletters are archived there. You can pay your annual membership fee on the Membership page and make donations. Please explore and share:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Continued thanks to webmaster Chris Boles of Caledonian Websites:

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Membership Reminder

Please pay in November on the membership page of our website, or, if you pay by online banking, please give your name to identify your payment.

If you wish to pay by cheque, send to the address below, cheques payable to Pax Christi Scotland.

You can also make regular donations on our 'donate' page or by standing order - thank you.

Membership fees per annum are £10 for waged, £5 for unwaged.

Explore the website for all our activities:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Where to find Pax Christi Scotland:

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The journey towards a peace based on justice

Abigail Abysalh Metzger was recently appointed as an Ambassador of Peace by Pax Christi USA in recognition of her dedicated service to the movement and her commitment to Gospel nonviolence. Abigail, who lives in New Jersey, represents Pax Christi as part of its UN team and with other organisations working specifically on Palestinian advocacy. Here she reflects on her new role as Ambassador of Peace.

What does it mean to be an Ambassador of Peace when the world is being ravaged by war and violence? How do you assume such a role in a meaningful way?

These are questions that I have been asking myself since I was given this honour by Pax Christi USA at its conference in July.

Everyday Pax Christi members, whether in the US or around the globe, try to contribute to creating a more just and peaceful world. For me, that means devoting my efforts in pursuit of what seems an elusive goal of a just peace in the Holy Land.

This has always been difficult but witnessing the horrors of the last 22 months has challenged me to keep the spirit of "Ambassador of Peace" alive in my heart and actions.

There is an organisation whose name, an oxymoron really, seems a more appropriate title for me at this moment – Combatants for Peace. In these dark and perilous times, I want to be a combatant – not with violence – but a relentless commitment to fight for those living under the scourge of occupation and bombs.

But how? it all seems so infuriatingly pointless. We write, we protest, we donate, we pray yet the images of starving children, grieving mothers, destroyed homes, uprooted or burned olive trees make our efforts seem for naught.

So, the challenge at least as I see it is how do we become combatants

for hope? How do we restore and replenish ourselves and others so that we can continue to stave off the despair of this terrible moment? How do we embody the beautiful Palestinian spirit of *sumud* – a stubborn resistance and resilience in the face of all odds?

I am sure I do not have the answers. But what I do know from my work with amazing colleagues at the United Nations, advocacy and humanitarian organisations, is that change will only come if we stand together and create a force that cannot be ignored. This is not the moment to shrink back and throw up our hands. It is the time to gather all our inner strength and determination to "fight" another day. It is said that despair is the luxury of the privileged. We must refuse to indulge in this luxury though the temptation may be strong when the news just seems too much.

We must remain companions on the long and arduous journey towards a peace based on justice. We must all be ambassadors and combatants determined to do our part in this righteous fight.

Abigail Abysalh Metzger

