



# Pax Scotia

## Issue 32

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Bishop Brian McGee, Bishop of Argyll & the Isles & Bishop President of SCIAF, reflects on:

## Responsibility in War, Peace and Politics



*Displaced Kenyans in Nakuru, visited by Bishop Brian in 2007*

My mum, being from Belfast, meant that I often heard people offering simplistic comments and solutions regarding the situation there. The reality, of course, was much more complex and multi-layered. This experience has made me reluctant to 'speak with authority' regarding other nations' challenges. However, one place I often reflect on is Kericho, Kenya whose people I first fell in love with in the year 2000.

Over an 18-year period I volunteered eight times, normally for one month, at the town's HIV/AIDS Clinic called Live With Hope. The regular visits allowed genuine friendships to develop, aided in part, by increasingly more meaningful conversations. Live was always tough, living as they did in the slum area of Matobo.

However, in 2007 post-election violence tore Kericho apart. Neighbours turned on each other. People were killed. I visited Kenya six weeks later. I was scared but also horrified at what I saw – and the people I didn't see. Thousands had fled from the brutal inter-tribal fighting. Many of the slum's wooden or corrugated iron homes had burnt down.

What I struggled to comprehend was the anger which had consumed those who had spent the time and energy destroying, by hand, stone houses which belonged to the 'wrong tribes'. The poor suffered once again as they were made homeless and unemployed. Looting and acts of violence were widespread. I visited a large camp for the displaced in Nakuru. I still remember my sadness at visiting people in tents who had previously offered me the hospitality of their homes. Two Irish missionaries – veterans of prior ethnic violence - shared their brokenness: "Not one parishioner warned us that this would happen.

Their circumcision vow (to protect their tribe) was more important than their Baptismal Promises."

My next visit was in 2009 with a parish group – a year before the next election. Sr Placida, the Scottish Director of Live With Hope, had requested that we organise a Festival for Peace. We worked with the local youth, pooling our respective talents and insights as well as ecumenically and with other faiths. The Festival, well attended, appealed for unity. Through spiritual, sporting and cultural activities, tribal diversity was celebrated but also mutual respect encouraged. Although we played our part, the major effort was by the locals, a grass roots endeavour to reject violence.

***Too often war and violence are considered as the "go to solution". Pope Francis has consistently offered a contrary vision. He rejects violence and instead highlights nonviolence as the path of Jesus and therefore of the disciple. Indeed, for every human being. The Pope teaches that we cannot just wait for Governments to act but that each person must pray and work for peace as best as he or she can. We all have a responsibility.***

Subsequent Kenyan elections still cause anxiety but the widespread violence has not been repeated. I am not so naïve as to presume that this is all down to our Peace Festival but I do believe that God always uses our efforts, no matter how modest, to the good. + *Brian McGee*

*The Illegal Migration Bill 2022-23 passed its second reading on March 13. The controversy over the Bill continues and Pax Christi Scotland believes it is an inhumane piece of legislation. Those fleeing from conflict or disaster are our brothers and sisters. Pope Francis says a 'humanitarian corridors' project in Europe protects the dignity of migrants, breaks down walls of indifference, and provides a hopeful vision for the future in Europe. How are other countries responding to this worldwide crisis? Here is a voice from Zambia...*



# A Call for Empathy and Compassion

**Rickon Mwiinga** is studying Theology at Rhema Zambia, while working for Lusaka Hotel as an IT manager, and running a tourism business as a young entrepreneur. **Zambia** is a landlocked sub-Saharan country which has several neighbours experiencing conflict.

## The Reality of Hosting Refugees

Refugees are individuals who have been forced to flee their homes due to persecution, war, or violence. They are often seeking safety and protection in countries other than their own. As a Zambian citizen, it is important to reflect on our attitudes towards refugees and how we can better support them.

Firstly, it is crucial to acknowledge that refugees are often fleeing unimaginable horrors in their home countries. These individuals have faced significant hardship and trauma, and it is understandable that they would seek refuge in other countries. As such, it is important to approach the topic of refugees with empathy and compassion.

However, we currently have more than 104,060 refugees in the country, therefore, the reality is that many Zambians including me view refugees as a burden rather than as individuals in need of support. We recently experienced gassing and kidnapping of young girls, which sent a very high amount of fear to our young sisters and brothers, worse to our mothers, and in the end we Zambians threw the blame on the migrants because of lack of information from the government.

This attitude is often fuelled by misinformation and stereotypes about refugees. For instance, some may view refugees as criminals, terrorists, or as draining resources from the country. These stereotypes are not only false but also harmful to refugees who are already vulnerable.

Furthermore, Zambia has often been a destination for refugees, and as such, we should embrace them with open arms. It is important to welcome them and provide them with the necessary support to rebuild their lives. This includes access to basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare, as well as opportunities for education and employment.

In recent years, Zambia has made strides towards supporting refugees. For instance, the country has implemented policies that allow refugees to access education and employment opportunities. Additionally, Zambia has provided refuge to individuals fleeing conflict in neighbouring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola.



**Rickon Mwiinga**

**While these efforts are commendable, there is still more work to be done. And my prayer is to continue advocating for policies and programmes that support refugees. Additionally, we must challenge negative stereotypes and misinformation about refugees to promote a more welcoming and inclusive society.**

As Zambian citizens, it is important to reflect on our attitudes towards refugees. We must approach this issue with empathy and compassion, recognising the hardships that refugees have faced. Moreover, it is important to welcome refugees and provide them with the support they need to rebuild their lives. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and supportive society for all because at the end we are all humans.

**Rickon Mwiinga**



*Many refugees in Zambia have fled increasing instability in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where already more than 5.8 million women, men, girls and boys are internally displaced by conflict.*



# An end to the Israeli occupation - so much easier said than done

*Pax Christi Scotland member Anne-Marie Clements has recently returned from the Holy Land. She graduated last year from the University of Glasgow, achieving a Master's with Distinction in Human Rights and International Politics. She has visited Palestine and Israel twice, most recently in February as part of an ecumenical group who were participating in a course to explore Christian approaches to peacebuilding.*

**A**dvocating for a just peace in The Holy Land is a priority for many Christian nonviolence initiatives, including Pax Christi. But what does it mean to 'advocate for a just peace'? How can it be achieved in Palestine and Israel?

If asked to define peace in international affairs, we may describe a conflict situation that has ended and any violence associated with it subsequently ceased. This somewhat 'classic' notion of peace is known in peace theory as 'negative peace'. Negative peace is not an unfavourable state as the name might suggest, but instead describes a condition where the occurrence of an undesirable phenomenon, such as violence, has ended. At the outset, this seems like a worthy goal for Palestine and Israel: as advocates for peace, do we not desire an end to the violence that permeates the land that is so sacred to all three Abrahamic faiths and that adversely impacts the lives of so many who live there? Of course, the answer to these questions is yes.

*Is an end to violence between Palestinians and Israelis in The Holy Land enough, however, to ensure a lasting peace?*

Consider that today Israel continues to expand Jewish-only settlements on occupied Palestinian land which are illegal under international law. It enforces a land, sea, and air blockade so unyielding around Gaza that commentators have described Gaza as the world's largest open-air prison. Additionally, Israel maintains a 'Separation Wall' around the West Bank despite a 2004 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion concluding that the Wall violates international law and should be removed. The Wall exceeds 700km in length and, save for access through strictly controlled military check points, cuts off the West Bank from Israel and Jerusalem, having serious implications for Palestinian freedom of movement, access to employment, and freedom to worship at holy places. An end to violence on its own is not enough to tackle these injustices.



*Anne-Marie Clements reflects on peacebuilding in the Holy Land*

## **Blessed are the peacemakers...**

Returning to peace theory, a 'positive peace' or what we may refer to in Christian non-violence circles as a 'just peace' involves the pursuit of social cohesion between parties to a conflict and addresses the conditions that gave rise to or perpetuate the conflict. A just peace is not only the ceasing of something, as is the case with negative peace, but the 'doing' of something in order to build a peace that is free of violence *and* equitable, sustainable and advances justice.

In Palestine and Israel then, pursuit of just peace must involve a resolution to the problem of settlements, ending the blockade of Gaza, and dismantling of the Separation Wall. A just peace, in short, requires an end to the Israeli occupation. A statement simpler to articulate than it is to achieve but perhaps we should look to Jesus' assertion that 'blessed are the peacemakers' as inspiration. After all it was on the shores of the Sea of Galilee in what is today's Israel and Palestine, that this call to be peacemakers was first proclaimed.

*Anne-Marie Clements*

