



Pax Scotia

Issue 39

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Holy Land Conflict: Responding with the truth

Abigail Abysalh Metzger is the Pax Christi International representative to the UN's NGO Working Group on Israel/Palestine, & she serves on the board of Pax Christi Metro-NY. Abigail has visited Israel-Palestine three times and she has led the difficult task of producing recent statements on the current Palestine-Israel conflict for Pax Christi International. Here she suggests how we can each respond to that situation...

In the past weeks, the world has witnessed unthinkable tragedy in Israel and Palestine. For many, finding the right balance between calling out the atrocities that Hamas committed on October 7th while at the same time recognising that there is a much larger context in which these events have unfolded has been extremely challenging.

So, how do we respond?

Here are some thoughts from Rev. Mae Cannon, PhD. Executive Director of Churches for Middle East Peace:

- Christians should stand with people not states.
- Accusations of “bothsidesism” or “false equivalence” oversimplify what critics of Israeli policy vis-à-vis Palestinian occupation are saying.
- One can absolutely abhor Hamas' actions and also advocate for justice for Palestinians.
- Christians do need “moral certainty” about war. Still not the kind that ignores facts on the ground.

Where does this lead us in discussing this terrible war?

Hopefully to respond with the truth.

It is incumbent on everyone who wants to engage in dialogue around the current fighting to educate themselves not only about the events of the day but also about the history that came before. There are numerous organisations that offer excellent, factual resources (See Pax Christi Scotland website: www.paxchristiscotland.org). It is also important to filter news and social media reports – even those of trusted sources - for how they use language in creating a narrative.

It is imperative to acknowledge in every discussion the humanity of each person and their right to live in freedom and dignity.

One major obstacle in talking about this (or almost anything having to do with Israel and Palestine) is what has become a dangerous conflation of anti-Semitism with criticism of Israel's seven decades of occupation, 16-year total blockade of Gaza, and the many laws that have created a two-tiered system of justice for the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Never should a people be degraded because of their race, religion, or ethnicity. Any argument that accuses and makes a whole group of people responsible for egregious actions/policies is not only unfair - it is wrong. This is equally true for the Jewish people as it is for the Palestinian people.

It has indeed become more difficult to know exactly how to engage in civil discourse about many issues. However, anything to do with Israel and Palestine, especially when emotions are so raw, has proven even more complicated. Yet, as agents for peace, it is our duty to do as Jesus would have done and stand with the oppressed and marginalised.

*Abigail Abysalh Metzger
Pax Christi International*



Dr
Abdelfattah
Abusrour

Abdelfattah Abusrour is a friend of Pax Christi Scotland. You will have seen him on some of our online events, most recently in June 2023, when he joined other speakers to discuss the then situation in the Holy Land. Now Israel has declared war on Palestine following the despicable Hamas attack. Denied water, power, food and medical supplies, an already oppressed people also seems denied international justice.

Oppression

Dr Abdelfattah Abusrour is founder & general director of Alrowwad Cultural and Arts Centre in Aida refugee camp and teaches part-time at Bethlehem University. He is a painter, playwright, actor and director. He gained his doctorate in Biological and Medical Engineering in France. Among his many roles, he was President of the Palestinian Theatre League, & a member of the Advisory National Team for Strategic Planning for the Palestine Ministry of Culture. With children and young people, he has sought 'beautiful resistance' through the arts. This very personal response to the current situation & reads like a prose poem (sadly shortened for lack of space)...

Dear friends

I would like to thank all those who contacted me by any means to assure their solidarity and ask about us, about my family and community and people. I am grateful beyond limits for those who are with us in such challenging times.

Media journalists, TV interviews come to us, pointing fingers at us and asking this endless question: Do you condemn Palestinian terrorism? Do you condemn Hamas?

So let's deal with that.

I do condemn myself. I condemn my all existence

I condemn my own birth in a refugee camp in my own country... How dare I to be a refugee burdening you of questioning your humanity

I condemn my own birth for a being a Palestinian, while according to many Palestine do not exist

I condemn my parents, who were uprooted from their destroyed villages and brought me to life in a refugee camp

I condemn my own life, growing up, getting an education, had hopes and dreams to be a great biologist and researcher who will save lives... being an amazing painter and marvellous

photographer and fantastic actor and talented writer who will inspire the whole world... I didn't really get famous in anything I have done

I condemn myself, for claiming and continuing to claim that I am a human being, that I defend my humanity and dignity and those of others... it seems that I am only a human animal, or even less... that I am an alien who imagine that he has a place on this earth ...

How do I dare to even think that I am a human being like all of you....

I condemn myself of being a believer that human rights and values include us aliens.... How dare I think that we are even part of these values?

I condemn myself believing in international law and UN resolutions and all these declarations that: People under occupation have the legitimate right to resist by ALL MEANS. How dare I consider that we are under occupation even under an illegal entity that is represented as the only democracy in the Middle East. I ask for your forgiveness

I condemn myself for talking about this occupation as an entity. I read that what defines a state is to have: Constitution, defined borders, and Nationality....

And since what you call a state of I S R A E L doesn't have until today a constitution, defined borders even though they voted the law of Nationality that this is a country for Jew only.... But apparently you can just claim yourself as a state without any of these

And since what you call a state of I S R A E L doesn't have until today a constitution, defined borders even though they voted the law of Nationality that this is a country for Jew only.... But apparently you can just claim yourself as a state without any of these things... So please forgive my ignorance....

What can I say... I am so ignorant

I believed that a victim of rape has the right to defend her/himself... but it seems that I am confused... I didn't understand that we should praise the rapist and condemn the victim if she/he dares to resist... that she/he should enjoy the rape and reclaim more of it....

I believed that standing with the oppressed was the natural thing to do,, Again more confused because I really should never identify with other oppressed people. There is only one oppressed entity in the world and no other.

I should praise Israeli oppressing the so-called Palestinians... and teach them who they are and what is their worth in the eyes of international community.... That their lives are worth 0.....

I can never accept for the oppressed to get used to oppression and co-exist with oppressors as long as oppression continues

We will not forget... We will remember

We will not forget the silence, the hypocrisy, the dictations and blackmailing

We will not forget those who raised their voice and stood with what is just and what is right

We will not forget anything

You can continue to push for despair and we will continue to flourish with hope

You can continue to promote death... we will continue to promote life

You will continue to do your worst... we will continue to do our best

Abdelfattah Abusrour
October 14, 2023



For a peaceful & inclusive society, bring on the kids...

Mary Troup is a freelance music teaching artist and storyteller and was formerly Lecturer in Community Music and Learning & Teaching at the RCS. She is a Quaker, an advocate for the Arts in Healthcare, a committed climate activist, and co-founder of Glasgow Quakers Climate Cafe. Here she reflects on a very special performance of **'Wangari's Trees of Peace'**

Quakers' Advices and Queries 19 asks us how we share our deepest beliefs with children and young people, while leaving them free to develop as the spirit of their God may lead them. How do we share insights with them and learn from them?

Recent outreach work to develop a performance piece retelling the story of *Wangari's Trees of Peace*, inspired by Jeanette Winter's children's book, required a collaborative approach based on mutual respect between teachers, musicians and primary school children to identify the main issues of the story and to explore their significance for us today.

Wangari's Trees of Peace tells the story of Wangari Maathai's response to deforestation in her homeland of Kenya and her work with women to establish the Green Belt Movement in Africa. The performance piece was created between January and September 2023 and was presented at the Scottish Parliament on 21st September 2023 (International Peace Day) by children in Primary 6 from Oakgrove Primary School in Glasgow.

I worked in partnership with the children's class teacher, Karen Taylor, and young musicians from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The journey of making this performance challenged the children to enter and re-enter the story, to re-enact it, to become at one with it. They really took ownership of the story, demonstrating their passion about issues they were exploring.

The ensemble performance aimed to demonstrate the power of story and music to reinforce children's understanding of world events, the importance of living adventurously and the potential impact of acts of courage, carried out together, to achieve lasting peace and climate justice. It highlighted too the importance of ensuring that children's voices are heard, recognising their ability to contribute effectively to the debate on world peace and climate justice.

Values underpinning the event reflected children's right to take part in cultural and creative activities, to share freely with others what they learn, think and feel, to live peacefully and to protect the environment. Further to this, it embraced Sustainable Development Goal 16: "to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development" It emphasised Wangari Maathai's message – never give up hope – which is so

Mary Troup, who worked with the children of Primary 6, Oakgrove Primary School in Glasgow to produce **Wangari's Trees of Peace**



important in our work for peace and climate justice in the world today, and it celebrated the challenge she made in her acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004: "We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in this process to heal our own – indeed, to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder."

The performance was a most uplifting experience, moving many of the MSPs and invited guests to tears. Reflections received from the audience bear witness to its impact. They said "I felt very moved and blessed to be there... What a wonder to see the children pulling off such an extraordinary feat, and to produce something so powerful..." Testament indeed to children's ability to use the tools of music and drama to tell challenging stories, to highlight key messages and to call for peace and climate justice in our time.

Mary Troup

Links to the children's performance at the Scottish Parliament + UN & children's rights:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKdWEkOPLkw>

<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>

<https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/about-childrens-rights/monitoring-the-uncrc/incorporation-of-the-un-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child/>

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>



Our website

Blogs, podcasts, 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:

<https://www.caledonianwebsites.com/>

Membership Reminder

Please pay by the invoice sent out (see below) - OR

Pay on the membership page of our website.

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 are £10 for waged, £5 for unwaged.

Explore the website for all our activities:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Where to find Pax Christi Scotland:

<http://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

[@PaxScotland](https://www.facebook.com/PaxChristiScotland)

[@PaxScotland](https://www.facebook.com/PaxChristiScotland)

[@PaxScotland](https://www.facebook.com/PaxScotland)

Snail mail:

Pax Christi Scotland
c/o Xaverian Missionaries
Calder Avenue
Coatbridge ML5 4JS

YouTube Channel

You can find recordings of all our events at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@paxchristiscotland>

Click on the word 'Subscribed' and you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.

Pax Scotia October-November 2023 Issue 39

Could we remind you to pay membership dues by standing order as per the invoice circulated at the start of October. Thank you for all your support - we look forward to you signing up once more and to you joining together at the AGM.

Pax Christi Scotland AGM 2023

It was in November 2019 that we held our first AGM, having just been granted status as a member organisation of Pax Christi International. It had been an intense journey, sponsored by the Justice and Peace Commission, which sought the necessary approval of the Scottish Bishops' Conference. The Bishops' approval we then took to the General Secretary of Pax Christi International for ratification.

We held that first meeting at the Conforti centre in Coatbridge, Lanarkshire, home of our chaplaincy, the Xaverian Missionaries. It was well attended - but we were not to know that by the time of our next AGM, we would be in lockdown. However, we embraced online technology, and since then we have held not only our AGMs online but offered members and friends of Pax Christi Scotland online events with many inspirational speakers from around the world.

This time we want to do it differently. We will have a hybrid meeting, based at Conforti but linking by Zoom to members who are unable to be there in person. As our membership not only stretches the length and breadth of Scotland but also to Uruguay and Zambia, this is a chance to share time together in whichever way is appropriate to you.

Wherever you are, and whether you choose to join in person or online, you are all very welcome.

We will meet for AGM business on the Friday evening of **December 8**, followed by a social evening. On **Saturday December 9**, we will hear from a range of speakers who are concerned with Pax Christi Scotland issues, closing with a vigil mass at 3.15pm. Our chaplaincy, the Xaverians, and Pax Christi Scotland are subsidising the AGM, reducing the cost for those who attend in person to £55, payable on arrival at Conforti (see address in left hand column). Let's meet and get to know each other! A link will be sent later for those attending online.

Climate justice and peace are inextricably linked, which is why we are supporting the Laudato Si' Movement's invitation to young (18-25) Catholics to take part in the Laudato Si' Animators course. Email annemarie.clements@justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk for details.



The poster features a QR code, the Laudato Si' Movement logo (Catholics for Our Common Home), and the Scottish flag. The text reads: 'Invitation to young Catholics in Scotland... Do you want to do something about the climate crisis, but you don't know how to start? Join other Catholics from across Europe who want to take care of our common home and take part in the Laudato Si Animators Course! Laudato Si' Movement is thrilled to extend a heartfelt invitation to Catholics aged 18 to 35 across Europe. The Laudato Si' Animators course is a transformative online learning experience designed to empower young adults with the insight, practical skills, and spiritual grounding needed to champion environmental causes within your local Catholic communities. The course begins on 8th November 2023 and will run for 5 consecutive Wednesdays on Zoom at 6pm UK time. To register, scan the QR code or visit: www.laudatosianimators.org/isa-youth-europe For more info or to ask questions, please contact Anne-Marie at Justice and Peace Scotland on: annemarie.clements@justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk' Logos for Justice and Peace Scotland, Pax Christi Scotland, and SCIAF (Uniting for a just world) are at the bottom.