



Pax Scotia

Issue 44

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Offering solidarity, pledging our voices

Marian Pallister is Pax Christi Scotland's chair. Here she asks that we put our trust in the Risen Lord at this most difficult time for a peace organisation.

As I write this, the motion put forward to the UN by the US asking for an immediate ceasefire based on hostage exchange has been vetoed by Russia and China.

Innocent civilians – children, mothers, teenagers whose lives are just beginning to unfold – are dying in Gaza. They are dying because bombs are reducing to rubble the strip of land to which they are confined. They are dying because no food is getting through to them. Even if they were to find grass to eat - and we are told many are resorting to seek grass in the ruins - grass cannot nourish the human body.

They are calling it a famine. The dictionary definition of the word is 'an extreme shortage of food'. That shortage has been caused by Israel refusing to allow the entry of food supplies to the area.

My definition would be 'deprivation', and I use the word as an active verb: Israel has deprived the Palestinians of food, of shelter, of their dignity. These are human rights and as a peace organisation, we would always work for the provision of human rights.

In an unseemly slanging match, the US accused China and Russia of not wishing to condemn the Hamas attack of October 7. The US, of course, has already used its own veto three times to prevent a ceasefire being negotiated.

And while they exchange their harsh words, innocent civilians – children, mothers, teenagers whose lives are just beginning to unfold – are dying in Gaza.

Every document we have been asked to add Pax Christi Scotland's name to since October 7 has

acknowledged the Hamas attack. But every document we have been asked to sign has also emphasised the disproportionality of Israel's response. Every document that we have agreed to sign has asked for an *immediate* ceasefire, because innocent civilians – children, mothers, teenagers whose lives are just beginning to unfold – are dying in Gaza.

The US, the UK, Russia, China – are playing (and have played since October 7) politics; games that are so much more about their domestic situations than about their concern for what is happening in Palestine.

It took a country that recognised the reality of the circumstances under which Palestinians have lived for so long (not just since October 7, 2023) to seek justice. South Africa has lived through the hell of apartheid and was bold and brave enough to name Israel's actions for what they have been for so many years.

Of course, this area of the world has never been a happy one. The Romans occupied the territory when Our Lord was condemned to death, it was occupied territory under the Ottoman Empire, occupied under the British, and now, under rules that seem written to be broken, Israel is ensuring that innocent civilians – children, mothers, teenagers whose lives are just beginning to unfold – are dying in Gaza.

I wanted to use this space to wish all our Pax Christi Scotland members and friends a joyous Easter. We *can*

celebrate the Risen Lord, if we remember that Christ is the light of our world, the Prince of Peace - because it is He who has taught us to work for the dignity of all, to offer solidarity with *all* our sisters and brothers, to bring peace into this troubled world.

Thank you for your support for Pax Christi Scotland and for all those who need the strength of your voices, your emails, and letters. Have a blessed Easter.

Marian Pallister



Dr
Anupama
Ranawana

Dr Anupama Ranawana is a thematic research specialist working with Christian Aid. She is a theologian and political economist and her research and teaching expertise and interests are focused on gender and justice, decolonial thought, diversifying research methodological practice, religious thought in the Global South, faith and international development and the intersections between racial and climate justice.

God - under the rubble in Gaza

Dr Anupama Ranawana reflects here on the situation in the Holy Land and the UK government's response, which, she says, silences the Palestinian voice.

"Do you know who they killed today? They killed my brother and brother in law"

"They are bombing us, where do we go?"

"I returned because I had to find my cat, even if he is under the rubble."

"...and where is God now? God is under the rubble in Gaza."

These are phrases from news reports, social media, human rights documentation. The last is from a sermon given by Munther Isaac, a Palestinian Lutheran pastor who has spent much of the last several months asking why his Christian siblings in the West have abandoned his people to a genocide. What is important to recognise here are the specific stories, the direct pleas for an end to a massacre that has been ongoing for the past six months. The violence of war is always specific, and if this is ever over it will be the task of human rights organisations to total up these details - counting the human bodies, the animal bodies, the trees, the farms, the houses, the schools, the universities, the churches, the mosques, and all the different

things that make up the social infrastructure of life. As we all know, a new term has been coined because of the genocide taking place in Gaza: WCNSF - Wounded Child, No Surviving Family. War breaks and creates your life story.

This is even before we can start to have the conversation regarding the mental health trauma experienced by all sentient beings in the Gaza strip, trauma caused by the past six months, as well as the past 75 years of Israeli occupation. I recently completed a piece of research for Christian Aid on mental health and repressive regimes, and was struck by an interview with a social worker from Gaza who noted that affect to mental health is part and parcel of living long term under a state of occupation. She, as an activist and counsellor, was often having to navigate her own trauma whilst attending to others as well. The violence that Palestinians have endured for decades is both material and psychological, and will and does have long term, specific consequences.

The UK government's response to this violence has been two-fold. It has uncritically backed the Israeli government, including defunding aid to UNRWA based on

evidence that was flimsy at best. It has also taken on the stance of the 'generic response'. Any appeal whether formally submitted or informally applied in a setting such as BBC Question Time has rolled out phrases like "Israel's right to defend itself", "within the bounds of international law", "our longstanding policy", "a sustainable ceasefire", "Israel is fighting with terrorists." These are responses that deliberately silence Palestinian voice and agency. Such phrasing refuses to acknowledge the decades long occupation of Palestine and, in the present case, the disproportionality of the Israeli response to the October 7th attack. Further, such generic responses seem to ignore the ICJ ruling, which specifically ordered "immediate and effective measures" to protect Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip. The first of these was that Israel refrain from any acts that could fall under the Genocide Convention and to ensure its troops commit no genocidal acts in Gaza. Countries supporting Israel were asked to ensure that these provisional measures were met. There cannot be generic and vague responses to the brutal and specific violence being endured in Gaza. The UK government and its Opposition Party must find their moral courage.

We, as persons of faith must continue the pressure, and keep our hearts and minds with God. God who is under the rubble in Gaza, broken and bloodied.

Anupama Ranawana



Threats to democracy and to peace?

Dr Jamie Allinson, Senior Lecturer at the School of Social and Political Science, Edinburgh University poses the question...



Dr Jamie Allinson is a scholar of politics and international relations with a particular interest in the contemporary Middle East. His award-winning publications include 'The Age of Counter-revolution: States and Revolutions in the Middle East' Here he reflects on current restrictions on freedoms in the UK.

Accusations of antisemitism against supporters of Palestinian solidarity are not new. Although antisemitism is a real and increasing problem, most of these accusations reflect a faulty identification of Judaism and all Jewish people with the state of Israel and its colonisation of Palestinian land. Since 2016 the spread of the 'International Holocaust Remembrance Association Working Definition on Antisemitism' ('IHRA definition'), which uses 11 examples to illustrate antisemitism, seven of which refer to the state of Israel, has greatly exacerbated this trend.

Universities have been at the forefront of adopting the IHRA definition, with most UK universities doing so. The then Westminster education secretary Gavin Williamson in 2020 instructed English universities to 'adopt and implement' the IHRA definition. The Scottish government also adopted the IHRA definition in 2017. Such pressure has had a chilling effect on free speech and academic freedom around Palestine on universities across the country: turning legitimate disagreement into a disciplinary matter, silencing Palestinian students and their supporters, encouraging vexatious complaints, and hampering accurate teaching and research on the region.

It is speech and action in support of Palestinians and critical of the state of Israel that is overwhelmingly targeted and treated as a potential security threat. Since October 7, this chilling effect has increased manifold. Even before that point, as documented in the report of the *European Legal Support Centre* and British Middle East Studies Association (BRISMES) report 'Adverse Impact of the IHRA Definition', out of 40 investigations of alleged antisemitism using the IHRA between 2017 and 2022, none has been found a case to answer.

There have now been hundreds of such instances reported to the ESLC and to British Middle East Studies Campaigns (the organisation of which I am secretary). As part of a wider assault on free speech and academic freedom related to Palestine, the

Westminster Education secretary defamed Heriot Watt academic Kate Sang by falsely accusing her of supporting Hamas – remarks that the minister was forced to retract and for which the taxpayer has had to foot the legal bill. For a government minister to defame a private individual working in the sector for which she is responsible is a shocking and deeply

worrying precedent.

At my own university, the University of Edinburgh, the IHRA was adopted in 2020. The initial response of the university to the October 7 attack was to send an email linking to a Universities UK statement that threatened 'any student or staff member found to be supporting Hamas' with treatment of the 'utmost seriousness.'

Students have subsequently described incidents of intimidation, surveillance and attempts at criminalising speech and action for Palestine, including the carrying of the Palestinian flag. A meeting of the Edinburgh Revolutionary Students Society on Palestine in November was examined by police, who entered the room booked for the meeting and instructed university security to lock the doors until the meeting began. Staff members have reported fears about carrying out teaching or research on Palestine given the climate of repression and intimidation, or being advised by their managers not to mention what is happening in Israel/Palestine over university email. An article targeting various University staff appeared in a small right-wing magazine misrepresenting staff's research, teaching, and speech. Vexatious and damaging complaints have also been made about members of staff, leading to further self-censorship. I have personally heard from Jewish colleagues who have declined to speak publicly on these topics not because they are concerned about encountering antisemitism but because they are afraid of being falsely accused of antisemitism for their views.

The suppression of free speech and academic freedom both by the Westminster government and by university management's capitulation to its demands threatens not just Palestine solidarity or teaching on the Middle East. Such actions threaten the democratic rights and intellectual enquiry on which we all depend. For that reason, I believe they should be opposed both on campus and without.

Jamie Allinson

Our website

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Words that can guide our path to peace

Pax Christi Scotland has plans this year to start an online book club, looking at publications about peace and nonviolence that may inspire us as we work for a better world. Your suggestions are very welcome (email our chair at marianpallister.icloud.com), and please watch this space for an update.

If you have time over Easter, this book by Sarah Augustine, *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus In Dismantling The Doctrine of Discovery*, is one that contains much food for thought.

Augustine is a Pueblo woman who gives a very different perspective on colonialisation as she unpicks that 'Doctrine of Discovery' which legitimised the taking of lands from indigenous peoples. That doctrine was formulated by the Church in the 15th century on the grounds that newly discovered territories could be considered 'empty' if they were occupied by 'heathens, pagans, and infidels'.

And so, European explorers believed they were morally and legally justified in taking the lands of Native Americans, of swathes of Africa and Asia.

Augustine explores the misreading of Scripture that led to this so-called 'Doctrine of Discovery', which she explains continues to devastate indigenous cultures and the environment, and which she seeks to dismantle.

The exploitation of territories for their minerals, their fossil fuels, their very soil for industrial agriculture continues to be justified - perhaps subconsciously - by the mentality of this historical doctrine. Indigenous people and their cultures continue to be discounted as of less importance. We can - should - seek to change this injustice, which began with Papal Bulls in the 15th century and resonates in our world today. Augustine writes, 'All around the world, the Doctrine of Discovery legitimates resource extraction from ancestral Indigenous lands. Mining, fracking, logging, water theft, plantation agriculture and other extractive industries take resources from Indigenous communities to benefit those descended from European and colonial or postcolonial nations. In addition, these extractive industries often pollute the lands, water, and bodies of Indigenous Peoples or Indigenous homelands without penalty or censure.'

Pax Christi Scotland firmly believes that environmental injustice and threats to peace are inextricably linked. Books like Sarah Augustine's can inform and guide us. And the writer will be Scottish Laity Network's speaker on May 23, in Laudato Si Week. We'll share the link nearer the time. Meanwhile, let's hear your suggestions for a PCS online book discussion that will enrich our quest for a nonviolent world.