

November 5, 2015

Dear Members of General Council Executive.

We, as the Co-ordinating Team of UNJPPI are writing to inform you of the current situation in Palestine and Israel from some of our sources and to encourage the Executive to move ahead immediately.

Here are suggestions from UNJPPI for your action at this meeting of GCE.

1. Authorize GCO staff to move ahead with the resolutions passed by GC 42 immediately – and as a high priority. The church through the General Council agreed to” initiate and develop a program of education and advocacy related to divestment from and economic sanctions against all corporations and institutions complicit in or benefitting from the illegal occupation” We need to follow through on these actions as ways to promote non-violent change and to hold Israel to account.
2. Speak to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau along with other newly elected UCC people. We can be explicit about what is happening in Palestine and ask the new government to call on the governments of Israel and Palestine to support International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law as well as the 4th Geneva Convention. Some of our returned ecumenical companions could help draft these messages.
3. Speak to the press. Hold a press conference. Have the Moderator speak as one new leader to another new leader. Send out press releases to all major news outlets.
4. We can write to the CBC, be-moaning the inadequate and mis-leading coverage of what is happening to Palestinians.

UNJPPI is ready and eager to support this work. Enough people have been killed.

The following information is current as of late October, giving a taste of the suffering of our Palestinian brothers and sisters.

1. October 26, 2015 from Jan McIntyre (a returned ecumenical companion from rural Manitoba). She is volunteering in Hebron with an NGO –“Over the last 24 hrs there have been 4 young Palestinians killed by the Israeli forces here in Hebron.”
2. October 23, 2015 letter from Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb: telling us that within the last 5 weeks, over forty young people from Palestine were killed and over 1100 injured. See attachment.
3. October 22, 2015. Peter Larson from Ottawa shares this story:
“On my very first tour to Israel/Palestine in 2009 I met Hashem Azzeh. He is the tall courtly man in the moustache in this picture, showing our group around Hebron. He lived in a house that had been completely surrounded by immigrant Jewish settlers, many of them American, speaking with Brooklyn accents. They were protected by Israeli soldiers. He showed us how the settlers were trying to force him to leave, including attacking his children, cutting his olive trees and shooting holes in his water tanks.

He was a medical doctor, patient but determined. There was not a hint of racism about him. But he was not going to allow settlers to expel him from his family home despite incredible pressures.”

Yesterday Peter received an email saying that the IDF has finally killed him. The interview with him in this short video gives a hint as to what the Palestinians are up against and how evil racism can be.

<http://muftah.org/idf-kills-hebron-peace-activist-hashem-azzeh/#.Vif2PTZdGM8>

“Many of the people who show us around in Israel/Palestine are risking their lives to talk to us. I never cease to be impressed with their courage.

Had he been an Israeli medical doctor killed by Palestinians, no doubt it would be on the front pages of every paper in Canada. As it turns out, it did not even merit a mention in the Ottawa Citizen. Palestinian lives (like black lives) don't seem to matter very much.”

4. October 2015. From Said Al-Yacoubi – a Gazan at Oxford for medical training this summer. He tells his story of speaking at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park.

“Before 1948, there was no Israel. Israel was built on the rubble of my grandparents' house. Israelis came to the land by ships and planes and ethnically cleansed my people from their villages and cities so they could build a state they called Israel. “How can you say we have to take lessons from a country like this?” I demanded. He replied, “Israel doesn't kill innocent people. Israel kills terrorists.” I believe there are people in this world who know little and are not familiar with the facts, and there are others who know the facts yet manipulate and lie about them. There also are those who we won't forget and can't forgive. I raised my voice so everybody could hear me. “I'm from Palestine and my cousin was killed in the last war on Gaza. Samar was 29 years old and was murdered with her two sons and 8-month-old, unborn child. They were killed in their home by an air strike, while they were preparing food to break their fast. You consider them terrorists? I volunteered at the hospital during the 51-day onslaught last year and I didn't see one single resistance fighter injured or dead. All I saw were civilians, mainly women and children. I saw my cousin with her children in one big black bag on the ground among other burned or mangled bodies. - See more at:

<http://wearenotnumbers.org/home/Story/114#sthash.Kebj6V9d.dpuf->“

5. On Oct. 27 the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling in Palestine released the following:

According to the latest [data released by the UN](#) on 23 October 2015, since the start of the recent upsurge in violence in Palestine/Israel (29 September to 19 October), 38 Palestinians and 7 Israelis have been killed, representing a ratio of **5:1**. During the same period, 5,075 Palestinians and 41 Israelis have been injured, representing a ratio of **124:1**.

During the same period WCLAC has documented 7 cases involving settler violence and night raids conducted by the Israeli military on Palestinian homes in the West Bank. What this evidence discloses is that in spite of recent media attention highlighting a recent upsurge in violence, night raids and settler violence are continuing much as before, suggesting that it is only when Israelis experience the effects of the occupation that the situation is worthy of significant attention.

How can we (UNJPPI and General Executive of United Church of Canada) faithfully respond to our partners in Palestine and Israel?

Jan McIntyre and Dawn Waring, returned Ecumenical Accompaniers, both currently in Palestine suggest:

“A good place to start is the opportunity to bring concerns regarding the occupation and the escalation of violence to our new government. Credible facts are found on the UNOCHA website. Canada is on record as supporting International Humanitarian Law - there is an increasingly long list of IHL (International Humanitarian Law) violations in regards to the occupation and this escalation of violence.”

Peter Larson makes explicit some very concrete actions which could be taken now to engage various ministers in the new government. <http://canadatalksisraelpalestine.ca/2015/10/24/lets-regain-a-reputation-for-fairness-with-respect-to-israelpalestine-some-suggestions-for-prime-minister-elect-trudeau>.

This is a KAIROS moment and we plead with you to give this the immediate attention that is needed.

We pray that you will have a fruitful meeting and that you will direct staff to begin this work immediately. UNJPPI is waiting to be helpful in any ways within our capacity.

Sincerely,

Rev. Steve Berube and Rev. Marianna Harris, co-chairs UNJPPI for the Co-ordinating Committee
srjberube@gmail.com; hologymom1@shaw.ca

Recent letter from Rev.Dr. Mitri Raheb of Bethlehem

Dear Friends,

A new wave of political unrest is here. Within the last five weeks, over forty young people from Palestine were killed and over 1100 injured. These are not mere numbers, but young people with faces, names, and dreams. Yet, as if their lives do not matter, the Israelis are easing their already loose laws on using arms with a clear message of shoot to kill. For the Israeli government, these young Palestinians are rebels that do not deserve to live. They must be taught a lesson. To add insult to injury, you hear the western politicians talking about Israel's right to defend itself, and stand shamelessly with Israel. Thus, to those international players the lives of Palestinians are worthless while the life of an Israeli is so precious.



This pattern reminds us of how the world viewed the lives of black people under apartheid and how racism against blacks is felt in so many countries around the world. The same applies to indigenous peoples and the oppressed. The most dangerous thing however, is when young people from those oppressed groups are pushed to the point where they start looking for a life after death but do not believe any more in a life before death that is worth living.

In this context, we have three messages to share:

The first message is to our Jewish Israeli neighbors. This history of the Maccabees, of the so-called first Jewish revolt, and that of Bar Kokhba, teaches us that as long as there is occupation, there will be uprising. Over and over again, young people will rise requesting their freedom and this is their right. The occupation has to end for our sake and for your sake. Enough lives have been wasted.

The second message is to the international community: without justice for Palestine, there will be no peace for Israel. Unless we start seeing the lives of the Palestinians as important as the lives of the Israelis, the bloodshed will continue. Palestinian lives matter.

The third message is to our Palestinian young people: The question is not if we should resist or not, but the most important question is how to resist, and how to resist creatively. We do not want you to die, but to live for Palestine. Through your life you can contribute more to the future of Palestine. We want you to cling to your dreams, even if the occupation wants to steal these dreams from you, and if the whole world ignores your rights. The denial of your life and dignity with all its harshness should be used to propel you to cling to life and not allow anyone to waste it. Your lives matter to God, to us, your community and to those who love justice in this world. Your creative resistance will eventually free Palestine and then you, your families and all Palestinians will enjoy life in abundance.

Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb

Pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, Bethlehem