

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

Nov. 29 is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. For most Canadians it will go unnoticed. We are focused on other questions emanating out of the Middle East. How will we deal with 25,000 Syrian refugees? Should we continue the CF-18 bombing missions in Syria and Iraq in spite of reports today about more civilian casualties caused by Canadian bombs? What will happen as a result of Turkey shooting down a Russian bomber? For most Canadians, the problems in Palestine and Israel seems to pale in comparison.

Yet, how much of the conflict in the Middle East conflict is somewhat related to the unresolved issues concerning Palestine? How many realize that there are over 5,000,000 Palestinian refugees? How many Canadians actually recognize the media bias in reports about the current violence between Palestinians and Israelis?

Having lived in Bethlehem as a Human Rights observer I witnessed daily violations of international Humanitarian and Human Rights law by Israeli forces occupying Palestine. I spoke with many young people who had little or no hope for the future.

There lack of home is rooted in a 48 year old occupation where they see little or no real concern for justice arising from the West. Their lack of hope was reinforced by the war waged by Israel last year in Gaza where over 500 children died as a result of Israeli attacks. Over 100,000 people there will face a second winter with inadequate shelter. As of late September, construction had begun on only a handful of the thousands of homes destroyed. These young people ask why has there been no huge international outcry to investigate the destruction of over 20 hospitals and medical centers in Gaza?

Media reports in Canada blame the current violence over access to holy sites in Jerusalem. This is the visible issue where clashes have occurred but it is not the reason. I suspect more of it is related to the immolation of 18 month old Ali Saad Dawabsheh in late July and the subsequent deaths of his parents from that same attack. Israeli officials seem to know who the Israeli settlers are who were responsible for this heinous act but have said they do not want to jeopardize their sources - whatever that means.

In the West Bank, there are two justice systems. One applies to Palestinians where there is over a 99% conviction rate according to Israeli statistics and where 12 year olds are frequently arrested. The second applies to the illegal settlers and the Israeli military where the wheels of justice don't even bother to turn.

On this day, let us pray for peace with justice for both Palestinians and Israelis. Let us learn more about the conflict and the injustice of the current situation. Let us open our eyes to better understand how the lack of justice has decimated the hope of Palestinians and is part of the root cause of the radicalization of many beyond the Jordan River.