

## PARTNERPLAN

# Muriel Pearson - Israel January 2024

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Dear Friends

Today is day 101 following the Hamas attack on southern Israel and the overwhelming response by the Israeli state which is continuing. Tension is running high across the region and particularly in the north of Israel where there are daily encounters between the Israeli Defence Force and Hezbollah. Neither side seems to want all-out war, but when the stakes are high mistakes can happen with inevitable consequences.



If there is no escalation in the north in the next week or so I plan to return to Tiberias at the beginning of February.

I have been based in Scotland since 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and have been speaking to different groups and churches in partner Presbyteries: Glasgow and Perth (and a brief foray to Edinburgh to cover for my colleague Rev Dr Stewart Gillan who returned to Jerusalem at the beginning of December.)

I have also been leading worship online with the congregation of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias and keeping in touch with partners and friends as best I can.

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Scottish Charity Number: SCO11353

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The overwhelming feeling from those I've spoken with here is a sense of helplessness. Night after night we watch horrific images on the news of destroyed buildings, of people picking through rubble by hand looking for survivors and listening to officials from the UN and World Health programmes and others talk about the scale of need and the impossibility of responding.

People in Israel are not seeing the same images. Their news feed is full of reminders of the atrocities experienced by Israelis at the hands of Hamas, reminders designed to stoke determination to continue the war. People in the occupied Palestinian territory get their news from other sources, an endless stream of misery reported on by Gazan journalists who have seen 82 of their number killed since hostilities stepped up. Young people around the world get their news from Tik-Tok and Instagram and like the mainstream media view have to be very aware of bias and prejudice.

The situation is polarized and it is hard to see a constructive way forward which addresses the fears and needs of both Palestinians and Israelis.

There are, however, some refreshing and encouraging voices. Rabbis for Human Rights, who have themselves been affected by October 7<sup>th</sup> have held on to their determination to behave with humanity, based on the Biblical injunctions to 'Love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with God'. You can find out more about recent humanitarian visits to the West Bank here. <https://www.rhr.org.il/eng?lang=en>



One outstanding voice is that of peace activist Maoz Inon. Yesterday, on the 100th day he tweeted:

'As someone whose parents were both murdered in their home on October 7<sup>th</sup>, it's as clear as daylight that we must:

1. Bring back the hostages at any price.
2. Stop this war and work for peace.
3. Demand that the government and the security establishment take full responsibility for this systemic failure.
4. Build a shared future and give some hope to every person between the river and the sea; a future based on equality, security, justice, reconciliation, and human solidarity.'

'At any price' is, I think, a hyperbole, and not to be taken literally. But those who want to hold out against any form of negotiation with Hamas are not prioritising hostage release.

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An organisation in the UK that stands for similar human values is Together4Humanity which is asking individuals and groups to come together to 'Build Bridges' on 21<sup>st</sup> January. You can find out more about it here: <https://togetherforhumanity.co.uk/>



Magen Inon, Maoz's brother, spoke at a vigil organised by them in London in December 2023 alongside Palestinian activists and human rights activists.

Together for humanity has called for people to organise 'Building Bridges' vigils in their local area emphasising the humanity of all and the need to stand together against inhumanity. There will be a small silent vigil held in Maxwell Park, Kenmure Street in Glasgow on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> at 5.00pm. Participants are asked to bring a candle.

What we can do seems so small in the face of fear, misery and unwillingness to dialogue. But it seems to me that staying alert, keeping informed, holding our own government to account and standing in solidarity with others are all important ways to develop an alternative, collaborative view of a way forward.

As we have said many times, the prayer from Christian Aid helps us enlarge our hearts and our thinking:

*Pray not for Arab or Jew,  
for Palestinian or Israeli,  
but pray rather for ourselves,  
that we might not  
divide them in our prayers  
but keep them both together  
in our hearts.*

Please keep dipping in to the page on the Church of Scotland website for up to date information from Stewart and me as Mission Partners and also for links to events and information which will help you pray in an informed way:

<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-views/church-of-scotland-in-israel-and-palestine>

Shalom, salaam,

Muriel

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