

PARTNERPLAN

Muriel Pearson - Israel February 2025

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Dear Friends,

This letter was written before President Trump's latest on the future of Gaza, which I plan to blog about in the next day or so (www.murielpearson.com).

I was home on leave in Scotland when the ceasefire agreed between Israel and Hamas in Gaza began on January 19th 2025. It is to be implemented in stages, with a certain number of hostages released and Palestinian prisoners freed in each stage. Staged ceasefires are difficult to maintain and plans for what will happen in Gaza going forward are sketchy at best. Suggestions that Gazans may be allowed to leave to Egypt or Jordan have not been welcomed by either country. Gazans who have survived 16 months of war and are now determined to rebuild on the rubble are returning to the north, but the future looks bleak. There is no healthcare or education and following the State of Israel's ban on UNRWA (The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees) there is great uncertainty about how aid will be administered and no clear governance in Gaza. At the moment, Hamas seem to have survived better than Israel hoped, judging by the displays of force shown when Israeli hostages are released. This does not bode well for collaboration with other Palestinians and other countries.

For Israelis, the main aim is to get their hostages home, alive or dead. Once that phase of the ceasefire is over, it is difficult to see a way forward for ordinary people.

In the West Bank, now being called Judea and Samaria even by the US ambassador to the UN, pressure is still increasing. In Jenin 15,000 are reported homeless following unprecedented air attacks by the Israeli Army. Hostilities in Jenin and surrounding areas between armed groups and Palestinian Security forces have been described as akin to civil war. According to [OCHA](#), between 7 October 2023 and 26 January 2025, 845 Palestinians were killed in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Of those, 498 Palestinians were killed in 2024.

Multiple checkpoints, refusal of permits to work in '48 Israel and very high unemployment (35%) continue to make life intolerable. Some settlers have been more aggressive and destructive, apparently with impunity.

News from Umm Al-Khair in the South Hebron hills is that a bulldozer has been brought in to demolish a house and the pressure from settlers is relentless. The expansion of settlements is happening not only in the West Bank but also to Bedouin communities in the Negev.

All this against a backdrop on the world stage of seemingly increasing right wing oligarchy and failure in the instruments meant for peace set up after World War 2. It is well argued that these institutions have been dominated by the global north and followed the interests of a few, but without a framework of human rights and international law, all of us are at risk.

What to do? Helplessness is a familiar and paralysing feeling, but we cannot let weariness and hopelessness take our attention away from what we can do.

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It is really important to be informed, to take our news from a variety of sources, and in particular from those at the sharp end and those who stand with them: Israeli organisations like B'tselem <https://www.btselem.org/> and Rabbis for Human Rights <https://www.rhr.org.il/eng> Palestinian partners and churches, and ecumenical groups like Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) <https://www.mecc.org/> There are many in Scotland and beyond who source good information and share it. The Facebook page of Friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100087362812554> is a good one.

I think it is also important to focus on what we can affect, rather than can't. Writing to MPs and the foreign secretary about UK involvement in arming and assisting the Israeli military is vital. Public opinion matters to those in government. Christian Aid and others have coordinated campaigns.

In terms of faith and theology, particularly now there is a Christian Zionist as US envoy to the Middle East and as ambassador to the UN, it is important to learn to read the Bible carefully and not conflate 'Israel' with the modern state of Israel. Palestinian theologians, reading from the margins, take hope in God's call for welcome for the foreigner and security for widows and orphans.

Prayer is also important – informed prayer that recognises the humanity of all and the fragility of the current situation. Christian Aid Scotland along with the Quakers and the Church of Scotland have a monthly prayer gathering (around the 24th of the month) and hear from Palestinian Christians and others of their activities and concerns. <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/prayers-for-peace>

My personal news is that I am hoping to visit the West Bank more frequently now that travel restrictions have lifted somewhat and that I hope to explore with partners in the north their programmes with young people, meeting young leaders and those involved. There are many partner organisations to check in with, and I continue to lead worship in Tiberias and Jerusalem, work with staff in the hotel and work towards a new flow of pilgrims and tourists, by helping groups plan visits that include 'the living stones' and not only the historical sites. The Visitors' Centre in Tiberias is in need of an update; and although it has stalled somewhat, I am hopeful that the Galilee Garden can take some steps from the page towards realisation in the next few months. I continue to enjoy time spent at Tabeetha School and have been involved in the production of a new video which will be available soon to help promote the school and aid in fundraising.

I am also glad to be in touch with Presbyteries, congregations and individuals in Scotland. My colleague Rev Dr Stewart Gillan is on deputation from now until the beginning of March, and if he is speaking in your neighbourhood it would be great to have your support.

Whatever happens next, there is a new reality in the Middle East. Let us stand in solidarity with all those who long for peace with justice for all.

Salaam, shalom
Muriel

Prayer points:

Alongside Christian Aid, 'we pray that the ceasefire allows political leaders and negotiators to address the root causes of this war. In this fragile moment, we pray for a just and lasting peace and for the powerful to recognise the value of every human life.'

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We pray that families on all side of the conflict may be reunited and for the displaced to return home safely. May shelter, food, clean water and healthcare be accessible to all who need them. We also pray for the safety of humanitarian workers as they carry out their vital work.

God of life and love, we pray for those who remain fearful for their future and all those weighed down by pain, loss and trauma. May accountability and truthfulness lead to hope and healing and restoration and peace.'

We pray for the congregation of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias that they will grow in faith and number.

We pray for staff at Scots Hotel, Tiberias and Scots House Hotel Jerusalem, particularly for those staff currently unable to get work permits to leave the West Bank.

We pray for Tabeetha School, students, parents and staff who have maintained their open, hospitable and learning community, despite the war and who are now looking towards the future. In polarized times, the spaces where Jews, Christians and Muslims can come together are more important than ever.

We pray for those involved in reviewing the presence of the Church of Scotland in Israel/Palestine, asking for new insights and practical ways forward.

