



Palestine: The Double Imperative, and A Call for God's Justice

Peter Makari

Global Relations Minister for the Middle East and Europe

“Ceasefire now!” has been a consistent cry for months among people responding to the unrelenting Israeli assault on the Palestinian people of Gaza. At the time of writing, more than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, more than 70,000 injured, and three-quarters of the 2.3 million people in Gaza have been displaced. Virtually the whole population of the Gaza Strip is suffering crisis levels of food insecurity or outright starvation, according to the United Nations. The urgent call for a ceasefire has been issued in the streets of cities around the world, inside and outside of halls of governments, and on social media. The United States has consistently opposed ceasefire resolutions at the United Nations, vetoing three such calls in the Security Council (Oct. 18, Dec. 8, and Feb. 20) while supplying military aid and materiel, thus enabling the continuation of Israel's military campaign.

A ceasefire is an immediate and urgent imperative to end the assault and offer some relief to Palestinians in Gaza who are starving, injured, and displaced from their homes and communities, with no place to go. Neither schools, nor hospitals, nor mosques, nor churches have been safe places in which to find refuge. A ceasefire is the minimum requirement that must be accompanied by the opening of border crossings to allow humanitarian aid to enter Gaza, and by guarantees of unimpeded delivery of that aid to those who desperately need it. Medical professionals must have access to the strip and supplies must be allowed in to address the massive and catastrophic health crisis caused by war injuries, lack of potable water and malnutrition, and the spread of disease due to the devastating sanitation conditions in Gaza. The people of Gaza must be provided with the regular health services that they have been deprived of, including safe births and neo-natal care. A ceasefire agreement should include the release of hostages, as well as of Palestinian prisoners held in

detention without charge. And it should end Gaza's isolation of more than sixteen years by Israel's blockade.

But a ceasefire is not the only imperative. In addition to rebuilding Gaza, the second imperative is to address the core issues of justice in Israel/Palestine, including land access and borders, refugee rights, continued settlement growth, and the status of Jerusalem. A durable peace cannot be achieved without resolving these issues and ensuring that the physical and structural violence of Israeli apartheid does not become even more entrenched. These issues are as urgent now as they have been for decades. They cannot be postponed to an undetermined future date. Guarantees of the human and political rights of Palestinians and Israelis—Muslims, Christians, and Jews—are a necessary condition for a just and lasting peace. Perpetual Israeli control of the Palestinian people in Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem denies Palestinians their rights, as does ignoring the rights of millions of stateless Palestinian refugees. There is no military solution to these core issues. Belligerency only delays addressing them, and without resolving them, there is an ever-present risk of more violence.

Last October, just two weeks after the escalation in violence, Palestinian Christians wrote a letter titled, "A Call for Repentance." In it, they stated, "Palestinian Christians are fully committed to the way of Jesus in creative nonviolent resistance (Kairos Palestine, §4.2.3), which uses 'the logic of love and draw[s] on all energies to make peace' (§4.2.5). Crucially, we reject all theologies and interpretations that legitimize the wars of the powerful. We strongly urge western Christians to come alongside us in this. We also remind ourselves and fellow Christians that God is the God of the downtrodden and the oppressed, and that Jesus rebuked the powerful and lifted up the marginalized. This is at the heart of God's conception of justice."

Neither imperative can be ignored, and neither can be separated from the other: an immediate end to the violence and a resolution of the core issues. They are both essential for justice and for life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Peter Makari is the Global Relations Minister for the Middle East and Europe for the Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ.

LEARN

ucc.org/justice

DONATE

ucc.org/donate

ARCHIVE

bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.

