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Responding to the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory: December 2016



Update on the current political situation in IOPT

The political situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories continues to be fractious and impact the socio-economic development of the region in a myriad of ways. Bitterness and violence are entrenched between Israelis and Palestinians and there is currently no peace process to encourage hope.

Since 2007, Gaza has experienced three military offensives putting ever greater strain on an already crumbling infrastructure. Israeli policies continue to control nearly all aspects of Palestinian lives and abuse their most basic rights. Israel's ongoing occupation continues to be characterised by its expanding settlement programme with approximately 600,000 Israelis now living in illegal settlements on appropriated Palestinian land.

The current Israeli Government is dominated by a right wing coalition which is creating facts on the ground in OPT at an alarming rate. In addition to regular settlement housing tenders, demolition of Palestinian property continues unabated. In January and February 2016, Israel unlawfully demolished or seized 104 donor funded humanitarian structures in Area C – in 2015 a

total of 110 such structures were destroyed representing a significant increase in this practice. The government is also threatening civil society space, with new bills introduced in parliament which target NGOs that challenge Israel's human rights record, particularly on Israel's policies in OPT.

Palestinian political division between Hamas and Fatah has destroyed any effective representation and, along with Israeli policies, exacerbated the split between the West Bank and Gaza. Growing unemployment and a reliance on international aid have become the norm for Palestinians, and the economy is deteriorating. The Palestinian economy is fundamentally a developing one, which exists within an economic envelope, a sub-economy of the highly developed Israeli one, meaning that inputs and infrastructure are prohibitively expensive and contribute to de-development.

As well as the blockade of Gaza and the restrictions that Israel puts on the movement of people that make it almost impossible for most to travel, study or work outside the Strip, there are also restrictions on movement which make it very difficult for people to work in East Jerusalem or in Israel as well as other areas of the West Bank. There are also severe trade restrictions and economic penalties imposed upon Palestinian farmers and other businesses who wish to reach external markets, all of which are in the name of 'security'.

Israeli society is polarised, with the coastal region largely immune from the conflict and those who advocate for the rights of Palestinians and for peace and justice risk being dismissed in public as traitors and tools of foreign agencies or

governments. Within both Palestinian and Israeli societies, it is rare to find positive images of the other and de-legitimisation is rife, and violent and often fatal attacks are increasingly common in Israel and in the West Bank.

Although the day to day impact of these factors are minimised by the remote management of partner programmes, inevitably there is significant impact on the work of our partners. Of particular significance, and increasing concern, is the de-legitimisation campaign against civil society, particularly those working in the area of human rights. Many partners have faced harassment, restrictions and challenges to their work, and all report that the environment in which they are working is becoming more challenging.

Another key challenge is the funding environment. As the crises in the wider Middle East region continue, inevitably attention and money is shifting away from the long-term conflict in IOPT to more immediate, visible issues. All partners report their funding opportunities are shrinking and partners (including CA in some cases) are withdrawing support due to limits on resources. This will inevitably impact on Christian Aid's ability to maintain our current level of work in IOPT, and to develop it further.

Advocacy in IOPT

Christian Aid has continued to actively advocate and campaign on behalf of those whose voices are not heard in IOPT. Although considerable work is constantly underway, advocacy and campaigning towards policy change can take a long time, often with little visible reward. The best result can sometimes just be to see things 'stand still' – while they don't appear to improve, they do not worsen. CA and partners in IOPT combine local and national advocacy efforts with

projects on the ground to create international pressure on Israel on specific issues.

Palestinian Bedouin citizens of Israel, inhabitants of the Naqab/Negev desert since the seventh century, are one of the most vulnerable communities in Israel, facing a permanent threat of displacement, home demolitions and dispossession. A state plan developed in 2011, called 'the Praver-Begin Plan', envisioned 35 Bedouin villages in the south of Israel being threatened with destruction. If implemented, the plan was going to see the forced displacement of 70,000 Bedouin citizens of Israel, and the dispossession of their historical lands.

Christian Aid partners, ACRI and Adalah fought against the plan, developing position papers, holding meetings with government officials, raising awareness of the plan and advocating for the rights of the Bedouin people at the national and international level. Partly as a result of these efforts, the Praver plan was frozen in December 2013. However, the Praver plan has still not been cancelled, and Christian Aid is continuing to advocate on behalf of the Bedouin people at a number of levels and through a variety of networks including the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network ('EMHRN') and ACT EU (formerly 'Aprodev').

We pray:

From the land of the Resurrection
and the cradle of the promise of salvation
to all humankind through Jesus Christ our Lord,
and with a candle of hope,
we pray to you, God our Father,
that the actions of the peace seekers and peace
makers may bear fruit, so that:
Hope will take the place of despair,
Justice will prevail over oppression,
Peace will turn strife into love.

from Palestine Committee of Women's World Day of Prayer,
Jerusalem