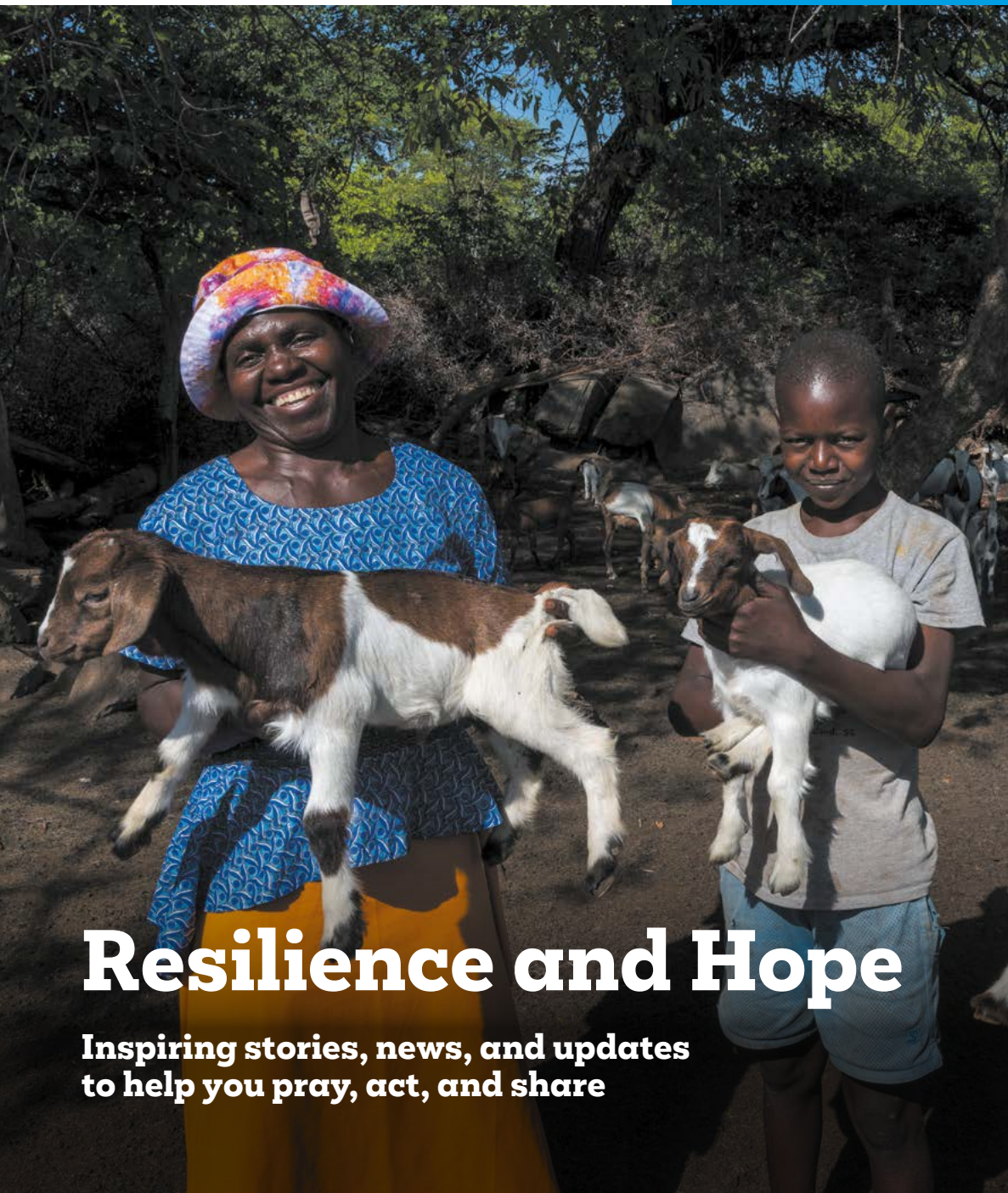


Commitment for **Life**

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

2024 | 25 Update



Resilience and Hope

**Inspiring stories, news, and updates
to help you pray, act, and share**

Christian Aid is the official relief, development, and advocacy agency of 41 sponsoring churches in Britain and Ireland. We are a global movement of people who champion dignity, equality, and justice worldwide.

Global Justice Now is a democratic social justice organisation. It's part of a global movement to challenge the powerful, and create a more just and equal world. We mobilise people in the UK for change, and act in solidarity with those fighting injustice, particularly in the global South.

Commitment for Life enables URC Synods and local congregations to make global justice a key part of their mission. We encourage members to learn, to pray, to take action, and to give generously for some of the poorest people in the world. 75% of all income raised goes to Christian Aid to be divided equally among the partner countries, and 5% to Global Justice Now. The remaining 20% is spent on education, resources, and administration.

Cover Image Sekai Mazarura and his wife hold their thriving Boer goats they have begun to breed through the BRAC project.

Pray with us

Pray for Zimbabwe

1. Pray for resources for Christian Aid in Zimbabwe as they work on climate change and livelihood resilience.
2. Pray for those affected by drought, that God will provide for them.
3. Pray for Christian Aid staff members in Zimbabwe – for protection, wisdom, strength, and team cohesion to do the work.

Pray for IoPt

1. Pray for an end to violence and the de-escalation of tensions across IoPt.
2. Pray for the work of Christian Aid and its partners as they seek equality and justice for Palestinians and Israelis.
3. Pray for the safety of our partner staff as they work.
4. Pray for wisdom and compassion in the hearts of the political and social leaders to see a just peace realised in IoPt.

Pray for Bangladesh

1. Pray for Christian Aid staff members in Bangladesh as they work on humanitarian response, economic justice, and gender equality in the country.
2. Pray for the elimination of gender-based inequalities and the work of upskilling women to have more opportunities to contribute to the society.
3. Pray for the humanitarian support work of Christian Aid with the Rohingya refugees and the severely disaster affected population.



Welcome

Dear Commitment for Life friends,

I remember the day I received my call up papers demanding that I present myself to the local military barracks sign-up centre. The South African Nationalist government had a policy of military conscription. Every school-leaving-age white male had to “serve their country.” Except, we were not serving anything but the very narrow interests of a small, racist, and extremely dangerous minority. At the time, South Africa called itself a Christian country. I wondered even how Christians could believe that violence was ever legitimate?

New Testament scholar Walter Wink spent time in South Africa studying state violence and resistance to it, both the armed struggle and non-violent methodologies. His key insight was that any time Christians resort to violence for any reason, even to resist a greater violence, they end up mirroring the very evil they’d hoped to overcome. Thinking that violence, even if used as a last resort, will save us, is a lie. He called that the “myth of redemptive violence.”

At a time when nations are heating up their war production and turning increasingly to violence, Commitment for Life works to birth a just, equitable peace in the world. Your support has never been more important in a world turning increasingly to the myth of redemptive violence. Thank you for your prayers, advocacy, love, and generosity.

In this summer update we hear good news stories from our partners and partner regions, all of whom refuse to engage violently with the problems they encounter, but rather engage with the unlimited nature of Christ’s love in action. Our Bible study explores the myth of redemptive violence in more detail. And so, let us continue to work unflinchingly for peace in the world.

Yours in Christ’s peace

Kevin Snyman



The myth of redemptive violence

by Lawrence Moore

Luke 2:8-14; 4:5-8 War, violence, and the church

Under what circumstances could Christians go to war and kill and maim people with the approval of the God who said, "Thou shalt not kill"? How can war ever be okay for Christians if we celebrate Jesus as the Prince of Peace every Christmas? Those were my questions at 18 years old, faced with three years of military service in the then-Rhodesian (now Zimbabwean) armed forces during the struggle for Black independence.

The answer was clear. When you didn't start it and if you are fighting to defeat evil – then your war is God's war. Then I'd be okay with God, because I was fighting on God's side. That's allowed – it's within the rules. For all the horrors of war, in those particular circumstances, it is a chance to make the world a better place.

That, in its simplest form, is just war. Or jihad. At its heart is the belief that if war is waged in the right circumstances by the right people for the right reasons – the violence can be a way of making the world more like the Kingdom of God Jesus preached. Technically, that's called "redemptive violence."

There is just one problem with this idea of redemptive violence: this isn't what God says or thinks. And it's not about breaking God's rules. War is a cancer, and if you

allow it to take hold, it spreads, destroys, and kills everyone. Or at least, that's what Luke's Christmas story tells us.

The Christmas angels: redemptive violence is a myth

Redemptive violence was at the heart of the Roman theology of Empire. The Emperor Augustus, stepson of Julius Caesar, had succeeded in something absolutely unheard of in the ancient world: he had brought about peace to the Roman Empire – effectively, the known world. His conquests had established a peace that was to last for 200 years – the Pax Romana (the Peace of Rome). Clearly, this was of God. The peace was a gift and sign of God's approval of the world, brought about by the Emperor, who was God's son.

Imperial public announcements, which the Romans called "gospels", were issued throughout the Empire, telling the "good news of the saviour, Caesar Augustus – good news for all people." Augustus was worshipped as the son of God and given a host of honorific titles that included Saviour, Lord, Prince of Peace – every title that the gospel writers would later ascribe to Jesus!

Luke frames the angels' message to the shepherds as an alternative imperial announcement. Jesus, the Messiah/Christ, is the true Prince of Peace. He – not the Emperor – is the Saviour. It is the Kingdom

of God that he has come to establish that is God's gift to the whole world – not the Roman Empire. Violence – conquest and military occupation and subjugation – cannot be used to establish a peace that benefits the whole world, particularly the people who are marginalised and looked upon as unimportant drones to be used and exploited by those regarded as important, powerful, and worthwhile.

Violence, peace, and the cross of Jesus

The problem of trying to use war and violence redemptively isn't that it breaks God's rules about killing and incurs God's punishment. It's not even that the evils of war cannot prevent great evil – it can.

What Jesus and the gospel writers are keenly aware of is that participating in war, violence, power, wealth, and privilege unleashes destructive powers that are beyond our control. They hold us in thrall to them as addicts and slaves. The Bible calls these powers demonic.

When Jesus meets Satan in the desert at the outset of his ministry, Satan offers him the chance to be ruler of all the kingdoms of the world in return for Jesus' worship. He guarantees that Jesus will be a successful military world-conqueror, like the Emperor. He offers Jesus the Kingdom of God without the cross – the warrior king Messiah that everyone wants and needs Jesus to be.

But Jesus has come to save the world from its endless cycle of death and despair. He has come to declare war on the Empire in God's name, to announce that the Emperor's days are numbered and regime change is coming. His weapon is loving servanthood, even death on a cross.

Jesus calls on us as his disciples to live his same life of resistance to Empire. He insists that the means by which we wage war will be carried, like seeds, into whatever new world emerges. The question of war and violence isn't about how we can circumvent God's rules about killing; it's about whether we will recognise that God's concern is to save us from our own addiction to self-destruction.

“But Jesus has come to save the world from its endless cycle of death and despair . . .

His weapon is loving servanthood, even death on a cross.”

A second chance



Yesmin puts her skills-training into action, working in the field to protect the trees with the pijara she crafted.

Resilience in action: Empowering Rohingya women

In Cox's Bazar, amid the challenges of the largest refugee camp in the world, Christian Aid stands firm in its commitment to support Rohingya refugees, focusing on the most vulnerable: women and children.

With many fleeing their homes in Myanmar to escape persecution, Rohingya families found themselves stripped not only of their possessions, but also of their sense of security and stability.

Since 2017, a refugee camp which was meant to be a temporary solution for shelter has become a home for many trying to rebuild their lives.

Among them is Yesmin, a woman of remarkable resilience who has weathered the storms of displacement and abandonment with unwavering determination. Forced to leave her home at a young age, she endured the heartache of displacement, only to find herself abandoned by her husband, leaving her with two young children to support.

Yesmin's journey represents the struggles faced by many Rohingya women; stuck in a cycle of dependency, yet yearning to break free.

Christian Aid and its partners created an opportunity for women to learn practical and marketable skills to earn a living in the camp. This opportunity to upskill,

Rohingya women received training in skill development, learning to use bamboo to make pijara, a type of fence for trees.



not only helps women to provide for their families, it also improves their wellbeing by creating a community of likeminded individuals.

The programme has trained women like Yesmin, in the art of ‘pijara’ – a traditional way of making protective fencing for trees using bamboo. Historically, this role had been reserved for men, but through advocacy and training from Christian Aid local partners, women now have the chance to acquire this valuable skill, not only providing them with a source of income, but also a livelihood and community that supports them as they work to rebuild their own sense of dignity and purpose.

For Yesmin, this opportunity has been life changing. Finally regaining stability, she can now provide for her children, ensuring they have access to food, medicine, and education. But beyond the material benefits, Yesmin finds fulfilment in nurturing trees, seeing them not just as sources of income but as a source of protection against climate disasters in the future.

In her own words, Yesmin shares her joy and gratitude: “I am so happy that I can earn now. I can pay for the groceries, buy food and medicine for my children. I am happy about this. I am nurturing trees, when these trees will grow, we can sit under them. It will be good

for us. These trees will save us from cyclones and other natural disasters.”

Yesmin’s story is just one among many. Through initiatives like these, Christian Aid continues to make a tangible difference in the lives of Rohingya refugees, restoring dignity to those who have been marginalised and forgotten.

‘... These trees will save us from cyclones and other natural disasters.’



Yesmin smiles, proud of her work.

Love in the midst of war



Christian Aid local partner
PARC provides meals during
the Ramadan season.

According to the UN, 1.7 million people are internally displaced, with 1.1 million projected to face catastrophic levels of food insecurity in Gaza. The rising toll of deaths and injuries adds gravity to the situation.

Airstrikes have caused widespread destruction of homes, schools, and healthcare facilities. Fuel is nearly depleted, most hospitals have ceased to function, all schools are closed, and the food supply is cut off, risking famine.

Our partners at PARC have shared with us that people are starving, and that hunger is being used as a weapon of war. The state of desperation is causing undeniable chaos as people congregate where shipments of food are supplied or airdropped, often resulting in accidents.

Food prices continue to soar, with basic vegetables listed at 25 times their pre-war cost. During Ramadan, the prices rose even further. A simple iftar meal that a family eats to break their fast during the holy month of Ramadan – consisting of potatoes, bread, beans, and tinned food such as tuna – cost an eye-watering £97, making food even more unaffordable.

Christian Aid partners at PARC have been on the ground in

Gaza, purchasing food items such as rice and meat in bulk and providing cooked meals, ensuring they are distributed equally and reach women and children. This timely response was critical during Ramadan, as more families would have been priced out and pushed into starvation.

Recognising the importance of autonomy and self-assessed needs response, Christian Aid local partner CFTA in Rafah have conducted assessments and provided cash grants to displaced individuals, empowering them to address their basic needs autonomously. This approach not only preserves their dignity but also enables them to respond swiftly to evolving circumstances. This was so successful that the partner immediately requested to implement the same project again. The CFTA cash grant project along with the PARC Ramadan food project was made possible by a number of very generous donations, including almost £50,000 from Commitment for Life – your generosity in action!

While responding to the direct needs in Gaza, Christian Aid has continued lobbying the international community to respond to the crisis. From signing open letters urging governments to act on human rights grounds – with over 300,000 signatures for a ceasefire and suspension in arms sales, to advocating through media platforms such as Premier News and Relief Web, Christian Aid



PARC workers purchase food items in bulk for distribution to women and children and households in need.

is committed to making the voices of those calling for peace heard.

Many of our local partners and their families are impacted by these crises, yet remain courageous on the frontline. Please continue to uplift them in prayer, asking for strength and endurance as they navigate ongoing challenges and respond to those in need. Together, through our faith and collective efforts, we are standing in solidarity and responding to the unimaginable hardships that people are currently facing in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel.



Sekai and his wife joyfully show off their harvest.

Unwavering hope

Zimbabwe has continued to experience unstable and unpredictable climate for the last few years, and this year has reached a peak with an ongoing drought. This has made it incredibly difficult for farmers like Sekai Mazarura who lives with his wife and seven children in Joromani Village, in Mudzi.

In the past, Sekai's family has solely relied on their farming to survive. As they have struggled to grow crops and have experienced poor yields, they are now greatly benefitting from projects like BRAC to learn to adapt their practices to withstand the changing climate.

The drought has become so difficult, that in April of this year, the president of Zimbabwe declared a drought emergency, and forecasted a \$2 billion need for humanitarian assistance in the country.

"Often, we would harvest very little because droughts or dry spells killed the crops," Sekai shared. "The rainy season is getting shorter, and often the rain comes late, or we go for more than 30 days without a drop of rain in the middle of the growing season."

Since farming is the primary livelihood activity for many families, no yields mean no income and no food. This proves a significant risk especially to women and children who can often be vulnerable to exploitation in desperation for their next meal.

"it was really painful for me not to be able to provide for my family," says Sekai. "Not to be able to pay school fees for my kids,"

In Sekai's community, farmer's lacked knowledge about which varieties of crops

to plant in harsh climate conditions. Through BRACT, Sekai learned about planting small grains which are more climate resilient and are more nutritious than the traditional maize crop.

BRACT has broadened both family and community horizons, enhancing safety and resources.

Sekai now benefits from diversified income and food sources through training in climate-smart agriculture, improved small livestock husbandry, and commercial seed production. And because of the skills he's learned to adapt to the climate, his family has moved from financial struggle to comfort, including having savings for farm reinvestment facilitated by the local ISAL (Internal Savings and Lending) group.

“it was really painful for me not to be able to provide for my family,” says Sekai. “Not to be able to pay school fees for my kids,”

Sekai has been able to diversify his livestock and has learned how to choose his breed and care for it. He emphasizes that livestock is crucial for farmers to store wealth, especially in a volatile economic environment and explains how his goats are thriving: “Unlike local goats, you have to look after the Boer-cross kids when they are young and make sure you give them the right vaccinations and worm treatments. But the price you get for selling a Boer goat is much higher than a local goat, USD 35-40 compared to USD 25, so the cost of the medications is more than compensated for. The kids mature early, and there is more meat on the adults.”

With the skills they've begun to practice in the community as a result of BRACT, “People are less stressed out about

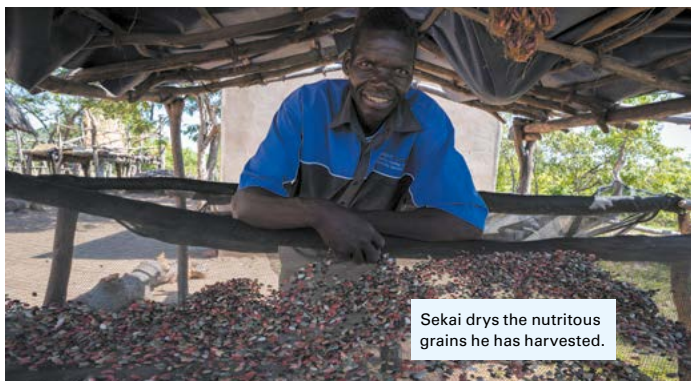
money and drought,” says Sekai. “We are working together, sharing our knowledge, and passing on the livestock.”

SAT support farmers in Bulilima

One of the hardest hit districts this year in Zimbabwe is Bulilima, where local partners Sustainable Agriculture Technology (SAT) have been responding with timely expert advice to preserve crops and livestock to support farmers to survive the drought. Using information bulletins on local radio stations, WhatsApp, and text messages, alongside village heads and local leadership, has helped disseminate this vital information to others in their communities every two weeks.

The guidance included practical tips on the best times of the day to mulch crops, control weeds, retain soil moisture, regulate soil temperature, water, and harvest crops, as well as ensuring livestock are kept in the shade to avoid dehydration. Over 10,800 families will benefit, representing half of the population of the district in Bulilima. 600 families will also receive information on how to grow animal feed (fodder) for livestock and learn when best to sell some of their livestock for cash to avoid losses due to drought.

Despite adverse conditions, families persevere and adapt. Let us continue to pray for those at the forefront of the climate crisis.



Sekai dries the nutritious grains he has harvested.



Interview with Christian Aid British Church Relations Officer – Grace Kariuki

Please introduce yourself and your role

I'm Grace Kariuki, the British Church Relations Officer at Christian Aid. I started in this role in March 2024. I am the Commitment for Life designated contact person at Christian Aid.

What inspired you to pursue a career in this sector?

I pursued working in this sector out of a desire to have a practical avenue to exercise my faith by caring for the most vulnerable and being an advocate for them.

In what ways does your Christian faith shape your work?

My faith gives me a blueprint to follow. There are so many great and practical examples on how to love our neighbour. It is a motivation to keep going knowing how I can do my bit, but also pray to a God who hears and responds to the cries of those in need.

In your time working at Christian Aid, what has been your highlight?

While I have only been with Christian Aid a short while, I have been amazed at the legacy Christian Aid has in many of our churches. I have met individuals who have supported Christian Aid for all their lives and are now in their 80s! What a privilege. It has also been beautiful to see how ecumenical working can bring a significant impact in bringing about justice and eradicating poverty.

Do you have a message for the churches and individuals that have supported the work of Christian Aid through Commitment for Life?

My message is a huge "Thank You!" You are making an impact – not only in your local community, but globally. Thank you for praying, thank you speaking on behalf of those marginalised, thank you for your sacrificial giving. I am reminded of the scripture that talks of us as one body. Each part of the body is important and vital. There is no action too small. It all has an impact in the Kingdom

of God. So, I encourage all of us, me included, to play our role and to play it well. Thank you being such an example so far.

Any final thoughts you would like to share?

I want to share with you my favourite verse: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10

We can never predict the next season we will be in. It could be at the top of the mountain, or at the bottom of the valley. So, whether you are going into something new and exciting or going through something really tough it is such a privilege to be reminded our Heavenly Father is with us and will also strengthen us.

That is it from me. I hope to have the honour to meet some of you in person over the coming months.

A just peace

Seek peace and pursue it, Psalm 34:14



Rev Munther Isaac of Christmas Church in Bethlehem calls for a ceasefire outside UK Parliament.

“If we lose hope, then it’s our Christian faith that is at stake. We cannot [stop] raising our voices to God and to policy makers.” *Munther Isaac*

The lives of Israelis and Palestinians have been shaped by collective loss, trauma, and fear. Israeli occupation and an extreme imbalance of power mean that millions of Palestinians live under oppression and in poverty.

The war in Gaza has demonstrated how urgently people in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory need a just peace.

Every day, ordinary Palestinians and Israelis stand up for dignity, equality, and a just peace – often at great cost. Let us stand with them.

We have created thoughtful resources to help your local church learn, act, and pray about the current situation.

Find them at: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/just-peace-campaign>

You can also join in this prayer of peace:

Prayer of the Peacemaker

God of Justice and Peace,
Make us peacemakers.

Give us courage to bear witness to uncomfortable truths, help us when our eyes want to look away from destruction and death.

Give us courage to speak where there is silence, to name complicity, injustice, and poverty. Make us dissatisfied by shrugging off the ‘complicated,’ Keep us curious to listen and understand.

Help us hold together Palestinians and Israelis, as we stand in solidarity against oppression. Plant in us persistence in seeking a just peace, let us not grow weary in our petition and our prayer.

Give strength and wisdom to all who strive for peace, on both sides of checkpoints and blockade. God of Justice and Peace, Make us peacemakers.

Amen.

Gaza: Arms embargo now

Israel's months-long bombardment of the Gaza strip has shocked and appalled the world, with death and destruction unleashed everywhere in the territory. This collective assault on a civilian population of over 2 million people cannot possibly be justified as a response to Hamas's terrible attacks on Israeli civilians on 7 October.

With tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians killed, including thousands of children, we cannot look away – not least because our own government continues to supply weapons to Israel, including components for the F-35 fighter jets which are being used to bomb Gaza. We need to stop British complicity in war crimes now.

At the end of January, the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel's actions in Gaza could amount to genocide and began a full investigation. Not only did this mean Israel must take steps to prevent genocide, but it also meant countries like Britain must end their own complicity and prevent it as well.

Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) says that, since 2015, the UK

has licensed at least £482 millions of arms sales to Israel. This includes £146 million in direct arms sales from the UK. But it does not include open licences for military equipment like components for F-35s – “the most lethal... fighter jet in the world” according to its producer, Lockheed Martin – which have been used in this latest assault on Gaza. Around 15% of the F-35 parts are produced in the UK, and CAAT estimates these sales to be worth another £336 million since 2016.

The British government's role in facilitating the most shocking crimes in Palestine is not a new development. Britain has consistently sold weapons to Israel, and engaged in deep levels of military cooperation, despite Israel's numerous violations of international law going back decades. Now more than ever, the failure to impose an immediate arms embargo is indefensible.

Things are changing, even if much too slowly. Spain has suspended arms exports to Israel, as has Italy and Wallonia in Belgium. In February, a Dutch appeals court ordered their government to block exports of F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel within seven



days, arguing that "It is undeniable that there is a clear risk the exported F-35 parts are used in serious violations of international humanitarian law."

**Now more than ever,
the failure to impose an
immediate arms embargo
is indefensible.**

By continuing to sell weapons to Israel at this time, Britain is clearly in violation of its international legal obligations.

Global Justice Now has joined the many organisations demanding an immediate end to arms sales to Israel and to the British government's cooperation with Israel's military.

Please take action to demand an immediate embargo on UK arms sales to Israel by writing to the Foreign Secretary now: <http://globaljustice.org.uk/arms-israel>

Thank you for your support.



Sekai Mazarura feeds the poultry at his home with a mix of grains he learned to make through the BRACT project.

For information about Commitment for Life, email commitmentforlife@urc.org.uk visit bit.ly/URCFL or phone 020 7916 8638



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