

Keeping Hope Alive

**Christian Aid's
work on peace**

**Case study: Israel and the
occupied Palestinian territory**



**christian
aid**

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Acknowledgements:

Thanks to William Bell, Alicia Malouf, Meenakshi Sharma, Bettina Vine and Richard Steele for their expert advice.

Christian Aid exists to create a world where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty.

Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of their dignity and lets injustice thrive. But together we have the power to transform lives.

We are a global movement of people, churches and local organisations who passionately champion dignity, equality and justice in 37 countries worldwide. We are the changemakers, the peacemakers, the mighty of heart.

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Violence and peacebuilding

Palestinian civilians living in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) face discrimination and systematic denial of human rights.¹ Ongoing occupation by Israel results in chronic insecurity that routinely manifests in violence.

In the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), forced displacement, home demolitions, Israeli settler violence and excessive use of force are commonplace. In Gaza, blockades by Israel and Egypt and the internal Palestinian split (ongoing since 2007) drive violence, and young people and women are particularly vulnerable.² In Israel, Palestinian citizens make up 20% of the population and are discriminated against, resulting in deprivation and even forcible displacement.³

In Israel, 49% of Palestinians live in poverty;⁴ the West Bank economy is dependent on Israel's and is propped up by international aid; and the World Bank describes Gaza's economy as in 'free fall', noting that it is 'an alarming situation with every second person living in poverty and the unemployment rate for its overwhelmingly young population at over 70 percent.'⁵

Forced displacement and demolitions

Since 1967 Israel has destroyed 48,743 houses and other buildings in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), including 20,000 houses destroyed in Gaza during Israeli military operations.⁶ An average of 606 structures are demolished every year in the West Bank.⁷ These are structures built 'without permission' by Palestinians and humanitarian organisations – the last resort when permission is very difficult to get. These are homes, animal sheds, shops and humanitarian shelters. Demolitions are in direct contravention of international humanitarian law and erode Palestinian life in the oPt.⁸ In the first quarter of 2019, demolitions have made 64 people homeless in East Jerusalem, including 40 minors.⁹ In Gaza, displacement is an historical and ongoing injustice. Two-thirds of people are refugees from 1948 and 1967.

Below: Ismail Mohammad Salem Abu Mdeghem and his wife, Sobheyi, are one of the two families remaining in the unrecognised village of Al Araqib, in the Negev in southern Israel.



During cyclical outbreaks of violence, Israeli airstrikes destroy residential buildings, and Palestinian armed groups launch attacks nearby, or from within, populated areas towards civilian populations in Israel.¹⁰ Inside Israel, many Palestinian communities are unrecognised and are therefore excluded from services and often coerced off their land. For example, the Bedouin community of Umm al-Hiran in the Naqab/Negev are being forced off their land against their will to make way for a Jewish town, Hiran.¹¹

Settler violence

Israeli settlements exist across the West Bank and are illegal under international law.¹² Attacks by settlers on Palestinians have occurred for many years and have increased in the last decade. In the last year alone, attacks by settlers have increased by 50%.¹³ Ideological, religious settlers have implemented a policy known as the 'price tag', calling for violent reprisals in revenge for Palestinian attacks on Jews. Settler violence is endemic around settlements deep in area C, which attracts the most radical settlers.¹⁴ In 2018, 75% of settlement construction growth was in 'isolated settlements'.¹⁵ This suggests that there will be more violence in the future and less chance for peace.

Excessive use of force

In the West Bank, Israeli forces routinely use excessive force, 'killing or grievously wounding thousands of demonstrators, rock-throwers, suspected assailants, and others with live ammunition when lesser means could have averted a threat or maintained order'.¹⁶

In March 2018, Palestinians in Gaza began the 'Great March of Return', weekly demonstrations to protest the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and calling for the right to return for refugees. In response, over the next 12 months the Israeli army killed approximately 195 people, including children, people with disabilities and medical personnel tending to the wounded, and injured 29,000 Palestinians. One member of the Israeli security forces was killed and six Israeli civilians injured.¹⁷ The weekly demonstrations continue. Inside Israel, the state has used excessive force against its own citizens. For example, during the protests against forced displacement in 2017, a Palestinian citizen of Israel, a maths teacher, was shot dead by Israeli police.¹⁸ Israeli investigations into alleged violations rarely hold those responsible to account.¹⁹

Gender-based violence

In 2018, the UN found that between the 'Israeli occupation and violence from within their own communities Palestinian women and girls suffer from a double burden of violence'.²⁰ Threats to physical and emotional wellbeing and safety range from physical and psychological abuse, denial of resources, sexual harassment, domestic violence, so-called honour killings, and forced and child marriage. A 2017 study revealed complex relationships between the violence caused by the Israeli occupation and increases in gender-based violence. Palestinian men who experience occupation violence are more likely to perpetrate sexual intimate partner violence, sexual harassment and physical violence against women.²¹

Palestinian violence and lack of accountability

According to Christian Aid partner B'Tselem, Palestinians have killed at least 1,079 Israeli civilians between the start of the first intifada in December 1987 and the end of February 2017.²² Palestinian groups have also committed violations, including indiscriminate rocket attacks on civilians in Israel.²³ The Palestinian Authority and Hamas have failed to investigate war crimes by armed Palestinian groups or to hold those responsible to account.²⁴

Disunity between Palestinian political parties continues to undermine the rights of Palestinian citizens. Both the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza have eroded democracy, removing checks and balances within government and curtailing freedom of assembly and expression through strict cyber laws and controlling regulations.²⁵

Christian Aid's peacebuilding work in loPt

Christian Aid has worked in the Middle East since the 1950s. The loPt programme currently has three areas of focus: promoting resilience, protecting human rights and transforming power to build peace. All three areas work towards a just and secure future for all people in loPt.

Promoting resilience

Participatory approaches to resilience

The work of Christian Aid loPt and partners is grounded in the needs of communities, helping identify their needs and supporting their strategies to stay on their land. Partners in the West Bank and Gaza have used Christian Aid's Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment approach, which has helped people at risk of settler violence or other violations that are a consequence of illegal Israeli settlements or blockade.

Below: Noura Amin Sa'ad with Kiffiya Mohammad Ibrahim Atallah S'aid from the Women's Association in Beit Shariya. They have benefited from the Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment carried out by the East Jerusalem YMCA.



Staff at the East Jerusalem YMCA Women's Development Programme were originally trained by Christian Aid staff and the approach funded by UK aid from the UK Government. They are now leaders in the field of participatory resilience. This approach is also used by long-standing partner Agricultural Development Association.

Protective presence and advocacy

Our partner the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) provides an international presence in order to keep people safe in key areas where violence is particularly prevalent in the West Bank. Accompaniers live with communities in high-risk places. By standing alongside shepherds, farmers, schoolchildren and people crossing overcrowded checkpoints, their presence enhances community safety. They also speak out to external actors about the lawlessness and vulnerability experienced by communities. Upon their return to the UK and Ireland, they carry out advocacy about their experience, to bring awareness to the hardships endured by people in the West Bank.

Below: The separation barrier at the entrance to Bethlehem.



Promoting psychological resilience in Gaza

The Culture and Free Thought Association runs four youth centres in Khan Younis, a conservative area of the southern Gaza Strip. Their centres are safe spaces where children and teenagers learn leadership skills and coping mechanisms for the protracted occupation and violence that they live with. The Women's Affairs Centre (WAC) provides legal advice and psychological support to vulnerable women in Gaza.



Below: Girls take part in activities in a centre run by our partner Culture and Free Thought Association in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip. The centre is a place where children and young people can have a space to enjoy themselves and relieve some of the distress they have witnessed.

Protecting human rights

Monitoring and documenting violations

Resilience is not an end in itself – there must also be accountability and action to change to the human rights violations that are pushing people further into poverty. To complement this work, Christian Aid supports monitoring and documenting rights violations. With partners The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, Adalah, al-Haq, B'Tselem, EAPPI and Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), we support rigorous monitoring and fact-checking of violations by all parties. This supports an evidence base for Christian Aid advocacy and feeds into international accountability mechanisms, such as the UN Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court. In this way, we contribute to a future where international human rights are upheld, and everyone is therefore properly protected.

Promoting women's rights

PCHR and WAC are two partners in Gaza that are strong centres of feminism in a conservative and increasingly dangerous space for women. PCHR lawyers travel the Gaza Strip, carrying out consultations with people who might not usually be able to access their services. They give advice on issues such as divorce and inheritance; they also identify and take cases through the courts on behalf of women. WAC promotes the protection of women's rights through advocacy, cultural events and support accessing employment.

Lobbying and advocating for international accountability

To promote accountability in IoPt, we work closely with allies in advocacy networks across Britain and Ireland and the EU. Most recently, Christian Aid Ireland has been working towards legislation that protects the Irish public from trade with illegal settlement produce and seeks to promote international law. Our partners gather evidence and lobby international organisations, such as the UN and

the International Criminal Court. In the UK, we have been exploring ways to encourage churches and the UK Government to 'invest in peace'.

Transforming power to build peace

Exploring and supporting the conditions for a just peace

One of the unresolved issues that Christian Aid believes is a continued obstacle to peace in loPt is the lack of meaningful dialogue on the Palestinian right of return and ongoing displacement.²⁶ Our partner Zochrot aims to change this and challenge the narrative in an increasingly right-wing Israeli society. It is pioneering an approach to bring awareness to the Palestinian refugees' right of return through cultural activities, tours of destroyed villages in Israel and promoting transitional justice as an approach to building a just future. Christian Aid is also exploring work with academic partners with experience in peacebuilding to identify movements with which we can work to challenge power imbalances that drive poverty.

Promoting peaceful responses to violence in Gaza

Staff and volunteers from our emergency relief partner in Gaza, Palestinian Medical Relief Societies, respond to the immediate needs of the injured and dying, eg, at the front line of the Great March of Return and by supporting the collapsing health system in Gaza.

Our impact

Promoting resilience

- Women leaders in Raboud, Area C, Hebron, built a culvert bridge over a stream of raw sewage coming from a nearby illegal settlement. They can now access their land.²⁷
- Our partner the YMCA Women's Development Programme is now a leader in the field of participatory approaches to resilience.²⁸
- Razan al Najjar was a volunteer for our partner Palestinian Medical Relief Societies. She was only 21 when she was killed while carrying out life-saving support to protesters in June 2018. One year on, her mother, Sabrin al Najjar, has trained to take Razan's place at the front line. Her actions display dignity in the face of brutal violence.²⁹

Protecting human rights

- PCHR and Al-Haq lobbied and campaigned against the problematic Palestinian Cybercrime Law, resulting in an amendment to the law.³⁰
- Christian Aid Ireland, along with other actors, lobbied for the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill 2018.³¹
- A temporary freeze is in place to prevent Israel's strategic demolition of Khan al Ahmar village in the West Bank. Adalah, Al-Haq, B'Tselem and EAPPI helped put international pressure on the Israeli Government to desist.³²

- WAC brought vulnerable women in Gaza together to develop a feminist agenda and vision for the future in Gaza. Its women's charter is now used as a basis for advocacy towards community leaders and the authorities in Gaza. In an environment where women are experiencing increasing violence, a feminist agenda creates space for reframing women's rights and lobbying for better protections.³³
- Christian Aid partners contribute to UN inquiries and the International Criminal Court to expose violations of international law by Israel and Palestinian groups, despite US and Israeli pressure.³⁴

Transforming power to build peace

- Zochrot has strengthened The Return Forum, a well-networked group of activists promoting the return of Palestinian refugees, working in a hostile environment.³⁵
- The Culture and Free Thought Association in Gaza worked with young people attending the 'Great March of Return' to teach them how to protect themselves and use non-violent means of protest such as cultural dances, drama and writing.³⁶
- EAPPI has built a relationship with a synagogue in northern Israel, providing eyewitness accounts and prompting interest from Jewish Israeli communities in the occupation.³⁷

Lessons learned

In loPt as elsewhere, violence is a major cause of poverty. It reverses development and destroys societies. From years of experience, we understand that cycles of violence in loPt are perpetuated by those with power acting with impunity and never being held to account. For this reason, we base our programme on long-term thinking, placing accountability at the core of what we do.

There is an international framework for accountability consisting of international humanitarian law and mechanisms to hold those in violation to account. We believe that only by contributing to these structures can we strengthen them. We support communities in loPt to strive for justice, so that they can achieve a sustainable peace.

Christian Aid believes that only Palestinian and Israeli civil society with support from international partners, can work towards a truly sustainable peace and just future. We therefore provide smart funding, designing grants based on what the partner tells us they need; be that for projects or core operations. We also examine the organisational capacity of partners and provide training where there is a need. We benefit by bringing partner technical expertise to bear on our advocacy work and draw on partner work to provide evidence for our messages.

Through our adaptive programming approach, Christian Aid in loPt 'deliberately set out to learn by trial and error, testing initial approaches and adjusting rapidly as evidence on possible avenues of change is acquired.'³⁸ In this way, the programme supports partners to consider new strategies and test their approaches. Since 2017, we have been working to analyse outcomes of our work, question our assumptions and test new strategies.

We have learned that building trust is central to working well with communities. Our relationships are based on solidarity – moral and not just material. Partners have commented on Christian Aid's solidarity during the past three years, not only in the form of emergency grants, but also with emails and phone calls from our staff during Israeli military attacks. For one Israeli partner, solidarity 'is becoming increasingly important [because] we need Christian Aid's stature to defend [us] from all kinds of attacks and smear campaigns.'³⁹

Poverty in IoPt is political. Christian Aid IoPt works in solidarity, love and friendship with partners and communities to help build dignity, stand for justice and demand equality. Our programme challenges the power that drives poverty. We stand together with people living in despair, to speak out against injustice and we contribute to hope for the future. This is something intangible, yet it is paramount to ensuring that in the face of profound adversity hope does not disappear, it grows.

Endnotes

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Cover: Palestinian woman Fatma al-Saudi walks her five-year-old daughter Ruha to school in Gaza City.

Photographs: cover, p7: Christian Aid/Heidi Levine; p3: Christian Aid/Amy Merone; p5, p6: Christian Aid/Sarah Malian.

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