



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
Office of International Justice and Peace

**Background on Two State Solution in the Holy Land
2018**

“...Inspired by a confident hope that negotiations between the two parties will once more resume, for the sake of ending violence and reaching a solution which can enable Palestinians and Israelis alike to live at last in peace within clearly established and internationally recognized borders, thus implementing the ‘two state solution.’” --Pope Francis, January 12, 2015

Background

For over 70 years a two-state solution has been sought to bring forth lasting peace to the Holy Land. But peace in the Holy Land has been elusive for decades and the long aspired “two-state solution” appears as far off as it has ever been. In most recent history, Israelis and Palestinians, supported by the U.S. and the international community, embarked on the Oslo process in 1993, a series of incremental steps intended to ease tensions and pave the way for a comprehensive peace negotiation. Through this process, it was agreed that the resolution of several outstanding contentious issues would be subject to negotiation. These so-called “final status issues” include Jerusalem, settlements, Palestinian refugees, and borders, among other things. While the Oslo process failed to produce a conclusive peace agreement, peace efforts renewed by the Middle East Quartet’s (UN, EU, US, and Russia) Road Map in 2003 reiterated that direct, bilateral negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians must resolve the final status issues and result in two independent states; a secure Israel and a contiguous and viable Palestinian state.

This past year witnessed a string of actions that has made peace negotiations appear even more unlikely. From the U.S., the Trump Administration moved the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, defying agreed to international norms, withdrew US humanitarian aid to the Palestinians, and closed the Palestinian Liberation Organization mission office in Washington, DC. These actions by the U.S. are intended to pressure Palestinians to engage in the U.S. peace process while simultaneously influencing the outcomes of final status issues including Jerusalem and refugees. Thus far, these moves have only strengthened the resolve of the Palestinian Authority to not engage with the U.S., calling these actions political blackmail. From Israel, the government passed a Nation State Law defining Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people and failing to provide constitutional guarantees for the rights of indigenous and other minorities living in the country. And from the Palestinians, violent protests on the Gaza/Israel border are now a regular occurrence, as are rocket and incendiary device attacks from Gaza into Israel. Israel and Hamas are inching closer to another war, which would be the fourth since 2006.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza has gone from bad to worse. The people of Gaza already endure highly contaminated water, four hours per day of electricity, and a failing economy due to the Israeli blockade. The World Bank released a report in September warning that the Gaza economy was facing “immediate collapse” with the economy contracting 6 percent and unemployment over 50 percent. With the current decline, it is estimated Gaza will be uninhabitable by next year with no more

drinkable water.

USCCB POLICY

The USCCB with the Holy See has long-supported Israeli-Palestinian negotiations that lead to a two-state solution and has expressly supported peace efforts like the Quartet's Road Map.¹ In an address to the Holy See's diplomatic corps in January 2018, Pope Francis noted "Seventy years of confrontation make more urgent than ever the need for a political solution that allows the presence in the region of two independent states within internationally recognized borders."²

In this context, the Church has maintained that the "status quo" for Jerusalem remain. Along with Pope Francis, the USCCB has expressed grave concern for the recent U.S. move to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem. The USCCB also voiced its opposition to cuts in humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians.

Details of these humanitarian programs and these related cuts are as follows:

UNRWA and Refugee Status: UN Resolutions creating UNRWA (United Nations Relief Works Agency) require the agency to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees following the 1948 Arab-Israel war, and any offspring stemming from original male refugees. Today there are about 5 million people who qualify under this definition and benefit from UNRWA run health centers and schools. Even though UNRWA does not have power to change this mandate, the U.S. Administration has echoed Israeli criticism of UNRWA's definition of refugees, declaring that it has political connotations and is a hinderance to establishing a peace agreement. Historically the U.S. has funded about one quarter of the agency's budget or approximately \$350 million per year. The U.S. Administration has called for the closing of UNRWA, has ended U.S. funding for the organization, and has encouraged other countries to discontinue funding the agency.

Cuts to Bilateral Palestinian Aid: In addition to cutting U.S. funds for UNRWA, the Administration also redirected all Fiscal Year 2017 bilateral aid intended for Palestinians. This includes over \$200 million in aid channeled through U.S.-based organizations (including Catholic Relief Services), \$25 million for the East Jerusalem Hospital Network, and \$10 million in Conflict Mitigation and Management funds supporting peace building efforts. In making these cuts, the Administration noted that aid was not in "the US national interest" and that it "does not provide value to the US taxpayer."

¹ <https://holyseemission.org/contents//statements/5787af00432a4.php>

² https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/january/documents/papa-francesco_20180108_corpo-diplomatico.html