



Holy Land Coordination 2017 communiqué

Fifty years of occupation demands action

For fifty years the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza have languished under occupation, violating the human dignity of both Palestinians and Israelis. This is a scandal to which we must never become accustomed.

Our Coordination has called for justice and peace every year since 1998, yet the suffering continues. So this call must get louder. As Bishops we implore Christians in our home countries to recognise our own responsibility for prayer, awareness and action.

So many people in the Holy Land have spent their entire lives under occupation, with its polarising social segregation, yet still profess hope and strive for reconciliation. Now, more than ever, they deserve our solidarity.

We all have a responsibility to oppose the construction of settlements. This de facto annexation of land not only undermines the rights of Palestinians in areas such as Hebron and East Jerusalem but, as the UN recently recognised, also imperils the chance of peace.

We all have a responsibility to provide assistance for the people of Gaza, who continue to live amid a man-made humanitarian catastrophe. They have now spent a decade under blockade, compounded by a political impasse caused by ill-will on all sides.

We all have a responsibility to encourage non-violent resistance which, as Pope Francis reminds us, has achieved great changes across the world. This is particularly necessary in the face of injustices such as the continued construction of the separation wall on Palestinian land including the Cremisan Valley.

We all have a responsibility to promote a two-state solution. The Holy See has emphasised that *“if Israel and Palestine do not agree to exist side-by-side, reconciled and sovereign within mutually agreed and internationally recognised borders, peace will remain a distant dream and security an illusion.”*

We all have a responsibility to help the local Church, its agencies, volunteers and NGOs. In the most testing circumstances they show great resilience and carry out life-changing work. It is our faith in God that gives us hope. It is the witness of Christians in the Holy Land and especially the young people we met that inspires us.

The Bible tells us: *“You will declare this fiftieth year to be sacred and proclaim the liberation of all the country’s inhabitants” [Leviticus 25:10].* During this fiftieth year of occupation we must pray for the liberty of everyone in the Holy Land and practically support all those working to build a just peace.

Bishop Declan Lang, England and Wales (Chair of the Holy Land Coordination)
Archbishop Riccardo Fontana, Italy
Bishop Stephen Ackermann, Germany
Bishop Peter Bürcher, Bishops' Conference of the Nordic Countries
Bishop Oscar Cantú, United States of America
Bishop Christopher Chessun, Church of England
Bishop Michel Dubost, France
Bishop Lionel Gendron, Canada
Bishop Felix Gmür, Switzerland
Bishop Nicholas Hudson, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community
Bishop William Kenney, England and Wales
Bishop William Nolan, Scotland

With the support of:

Mgr. Duarte da Cunha, Council of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences in Europe
Fr. Peter-John Pearson, South African Bishops' Conference