

From Crisis to Hope

Toward a Just Peace in the Holy Land



800 years ago during the Crusades, St. Francis of Assisi went unarmed to meet the Sultan of Egypt. Placing himself between two armed forces, he witnessed boldly to the Gospel message of peace. Empowered by a profound sense of Christ's presence in the world, St. Francis treated a foe with great respect as a friend. Unafraid of the other's truth, he was open to dialogue and to discovering the face of God in unexpected places, just as he had done in his encounter with the leper. It is this virtue of deep listening that is at the core of our Franciscan call to obedience: paying special attention to the peoples and places that are hurting and that are in need of our help.



One of the longest and most tragic conflicts in the world continues unabated in the land that is holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Its terrible violence has left both Palestinians and Israelis suffering. Recent armed conflict between Hamas, the Palestinian party controlling Gaza, and Israel has caused hundreds of deaths and massive destruction in Gaza as well as untold suffering among Palestinian and Israeli civilians. Four decades of Israeli occupation have devastated the Palestinian economy and contributed to the continued decline of Christian populations in the Holy Land. Hamas refuses to renounce violence or to recognize Israel. Indefensible suicide bombings and rocket attacks on civilian areas have terrorized Israelis. Poverty rates among Palestinians are nearly 65 percent, giving rise to increasing desperation. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and frustration are rising along with expanding Israeli settlements, Palestinian home demolitions, and increasing barriers to mobility such as the separation wall. Over two-thirds of Gaza's approximately 1.5 million people remain dependent on international charity for basic needs. The situation of these people is intolerable with severe limits on basic food, potable water, and electricity. The violence in Gaza has deeply shaken Palestinian society, with psychosocial trauma especially evident among youth. Furthermore, the ongoing Palestinian – Israeli conflict sends negative reverberations throughout the world, escalating tensions and strengthening extremist elements throughout the Middle East.

Signs of Hope

- Majorities of Palestinians and Israelis want peace and still favor a two-state solution.
- Arab nations have offered Israel a comprehensive peace proposal with normal diplomatic relations in exchange for Israel's end to its military occupation of the Palestinian West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.
- There is a growing recognition that the Israeli struggle to provide security and peace to Jewish people, and the Palestinian determination to seek justice and create viable state of their own, are not a zero-sum game; rather, they are mutually dependent on each other.
- Increasing numbers of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups in the U.S. are collaborating and helping to bring about a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land.
- The Obama Administration shows strong and determined leadership in pursuit of a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land. The President's speech in Cairo has challenged us all to help build a more positive future for the people of the Middle East.



Our Core Beliefs

We believe in the God of Abraham, whose love and mercy extends to all peoples and who desires peace for the world. This God, worshipped by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, has a special care and concern for those who are poor and suffering. The call to righteous living marked by compassion, justice and truth is a teaching common to all three faith traditions. As followers of the Prince of Peace from Bethlehem, we believe that a commitment to non-violence, justice and reconciliation is at the heart of our Christian vocation. We are empowered in this task by the witness of St. Francis of Assisi. His 13th century world was also marked by widespread violence and disrespect for human dignity that in turn bred fear, hopelessness and more acts of violence. Yet he refused to give in to cynicism or to deny God's power to bring an end to fear and violence. Instead, St. Francis chose to believe that God could use him as an instrument of God's peace to transform individual lives and societies, and to bring hope to the world. The challenges we face as followers of St. Francis are no less daunting. One such challenge is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Let us act on our belief in a God who "makes all things new" and for whom "nothing is impossible." Let us ask God to make us instruments of peace and reconciliation, striving to help Israelis and Palestinians to listen respectfully to one another, to do justice, and to not be afraid. Let us pray for spiritual courage and determination to be men and women of hope, through whom the Holy Spirit may usher in a more humane and holy world.

Franciscan Call to Action

We are at a critical juncture in the long history of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The window of opportunity is rapidly closing even though the international community and majorities of the Israeli and Palestinian people are committed to a two-state solution as the best option for achieving peace and security. As hope dims, the threat of violence grows and hardliners are strengthened. NOW is the time for immediate and bold American leadership. We, members of the large Franciscan family, join the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and many Evangelical, Protestant and Orthodox faith leaders in offering prayers and bi-partisan support for the Obama Administration's bold actions on Israeli-Palestinian issue.

What You Can Do?

See

- **Watch** a video: Searching for Peace in the Middle East: www.fmep.org/searching_for_peace_in_the_middle_east.html.
- **Read** a book: Healing Israel/Palestine: A Path to Peace and Reconciliation by Rabbi Michael Lerner.
- **Organize** a forum at your church with a speaker from the National Interreligious Initiative for Peace in the Middle East. Contact Ron Young at USICPME@aol.com
For more background information go to: <http://www.nili-mideastpeace.org/index.html>.
- **Visit** the Holy Land, attend the upcoming HCEF Conference. (www.hcef.org)
Organize Holy Land Days at your parish (contact Dana Baumann at dbaumann@hcef.org).

Pray

- **Include** the cause of a just peace in the Holy Land in your personal prayer.
- **Ask** your Church to pray for peace in the Holy Land at Sunday liturgy.
(More resources for communal and personal prayers available at <http://www.franciscanaction.org>).
- **Organize** an ecumenical or interfaith prayer peace vigil at your parish
(<http://www.nili-mideastpeace.org/prayers.html> and http://www.cmep.org/Toolkit/Worship_Resource.pdf).

Act

- **Go to** FAN's website to get resources for the Franciscan Peacemaking Campaign at www.franciscanaction.org.
- **Sign up for** Churches for Middle East Peace E-mail Advocacy Network at www.cmep.org to receive timely actions alerts.
- **Contact** your members of Congress.
- **Help** to preserve a viable Christian community in the Holy Land. www.hcef.org.
- **Encourage** your Church to do more on this issue: www.cmep.org/Toolkit/CMEP_Toolkit_for_web.pdf.

