



The Board of Pax Christi International welcomes the testimony of the members of the Pax Christi sections who participated in the Holy Land Pilgrimage. The International Board urges members of the Pax Christi community worldwide and all those in pursuit of a just peace to reflect and act on it with urgency for a people denied justice for so long.

What We Saw

What We Heard

What We are Compelled to Do

A Testimony of Witness

"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see." Luke 10:23

During the first two weeks of February, a delegation of thirteen members of the international Catholic peace movement, Pax Christi, travelled to the Holy Land. We came from six countries with a united purpose to reconnect with Pax Christi partners, see, first-hand, the facts on the ground, meet with religious leaders, activists, and those providing direct service and to speak with those affected by the occupation. Most importantly, we wanted to reaffirm our steadfast commitment and solidarity with our Palestinian sisters and brothers in their legitimate demand for freedom, justice, and equality.

What we witnessed was nothing short of heartbreaking. Families living in daily fear that their homes could be demolished, at a moment's notice, for lack of a building permit which is rarely approved by the Israeli authorities. Farmers who must choose between tending their animals and crops or being violently attacked by settlers. Human rights activists and other civil society spokespeople threatened for speaking truth to power and advocating for children, women, prisoners, or anyone whose rights are being violated. Bedouin communities who struggle to retain their way of life as they face sweeping eviction orders. We listened to stories of grief, dispossession, land confiscation, and imprisonment. We heard voices filled with fear, anger, defiance, and hopelessness. Everywhere, individuals expressed their frustrations with the ineffectiveness of the Palestine Authority and their grave concern for increased violence and repression in the future as the new Israeli ultra-nationalist government took control.

What we witnessed was nothing short of amazing. Caring teachers who transform rooms and playgrounds into places of safety and joy. Children who, like all children, delight in sharing what they are learning. Women who refuse to be overtaken by their situation and instead find ways to plant gardens, learn new skills and create income producing cooperatives. Organisations that offer a safe space for people to share their stories of loss and pain as well as hopes and dreams, thereby supporting one another and strengthening each other's resolve. We walked with international volunteers who

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accompany those under threat, using their presence as a deterrent from attacks by soldiers and settlers. We listened to journalists and NGO workers who are determined to tell the world of the daily indignities inflicted on an occupied people.

We came to fully appreciate the phrase, “to exist is to resist”. How the mere act of going-on with one’s everyday activities is a powerful form of nonviolent resistance. Our witness of SUMUD, a word that has come to define Palestinian refusal to give up and their steadfast determination to hold on to what is rightfully theirs, was humbling and inspiring.

What we witnessed was nothing short of an unfolding, deliberate plan to disenfranchise one group of people for the benefit of another. We saw the ever-expanding illegal Jewish settlements and the network of separate highways, bridges, and tunnels which support them. A modern infrastructure designed solely for the use and benefit of Israeli citizens. We stood at the foot of the monstrous thirty-foot-high, Israeli Wall which strategically weaves deep into the West Bank severing Palestinian families and communities from their land and each other. We watched as the checkpoints, barriers, and a permit system for Palestinians, administered solely by Israel, create unimaginable hardships that hinder Palestinians’ access to every aspect of their daily life – work, school, healthcare, and the freedom to worship.

Sadly, the situation in the Holy Land is not a new development, and the international community, including those who play leadership roles in it, are well aware of the reality facing the people of Palestine, which we have witnessed painfully. We ask: when will the international community act to bring freedom, justice, and dignity to the Palestinian people, in line with relevant UN Resolutions, and international law, and especially in light of the recent reports issued by human rights organisations?

What we witnessed is a cruel, unjust military occupation that has been allowed to exist for over 55 years. What we witnessed is the brutality of an oppressor, a discriminatory system that controls every aspect of Palestinian life, and begs to ask the question, is this not apartheid. What we heard loud and clear, from every Palestinian and Israeli peace activist we met, was a call for justice and equality and an immediate intervention by the international community to ensure that Israel adheres to all norms of international law. It was a cry for Palestinians to be seen and treated with dignity as human beings.

We have returned to our individual countries with stark memories firmly held in our hearts and minds. Our individual witness must now turn into collective action.

We are committed to:

- educate others about the realities of the occupation;
- demand an end to the impunity provided by the international community, which has enabled Israel to flagrantly violate international laws, the Geneva Convention, The Rome Statute, and UN resolutions;
- actively engage with policymakers and religious leaders, sharing what we have seen and heard;
- call for accountability for the murder of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh as the first anniversary of her death approaches (May 11th);

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- promote the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI);
- encourage others to go and see – not just the dead stones of history but also the living stones – to talk with and listen to the voices of the Palestinian people. It is our hope that others will hear their stories, enjoy their hospitality, and then share what they have learned with others.

This year, Palestinians will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Nakba - their catastrophe - when over 750,000 Palestinians were forced by fear or violence to flee their ancestral homes and the systematic destruction of 400 plus Palestinian villages was carried out. We are committed to honouring this sombre occasion and ensuring it receives the attention it rightly deserves.

We are compelled to continue to bear witness and to remain steadfast in our solidarity.

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