

## Equality is necessary for lasting peace between Israel, Palestine

Drew Christiansen Ra'fat Al-Dajani | Jul. 21, 2014 NCR Today

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*Editor's note: Today, we begin a new feature on NCR Today: a series of sociopolitical blog posts on issues related to the Middle East.*

More than 500 people have died in Gaza as of Monday morning. The latest tragedy came with the killing of over 60 Palestinian civilians in a Gaza neighborhood destroyed by Israeli shelling. Add to that 3,000 injured, vital infrastructure and apartment buildings destroyed, and 1.8 million Palestinians trapped in an area the size of Manhattan with nowhere to run from the death raining on them from the skies. On the Israeli side, the death toll stands at 20.

Every innocent death, Israeli or Palestinian, is one too many. All the same, the world has gotten inured to Israeli tactics of massive and disproportionate response to acts of violence. The stubborn, feckless resistance of Hamas gives the Israelis apparent cause for their indiscriminate strikes. Palestinian suffering has become routine. As a result, the international community heaves a collective shrug when they hear about Palestinian deaths. The world is no longer moved to learn of Palestinian affliction.

The unspoken feeling is that Palestinians somehow deserve such crushing attacks because they are not really "like us." They are friends to misery, well-acquainted with sorrow, willing to bear what we Americans would never accept for ourselves. Likewise, the Israeli narrative, repeated over and over by the media, asserts that the people of Gaza brought the suffering on themselves. The pain inflicted by the octopus-like stranglehold of the Israeli embargo of Gaza is ignored, even though, for any other people, Israelis included, it would provide a legitimate cause for resistance.

Insidious racism colors perceptions of the conflict and reactions to it. If we had 400 Israeli deaths instead, the world would have been in an uproar, as it should. Giving Palestinian civilians a couple minutes' warning to evacuate a civilian building where a Hamas member lives or had been a few minutes before when there is nowhere to run is a mere fig leaf disguising ingrained Israeli indifference to Palestinian life.

A typical Palestinian extended family of a dozen or more people, including infants and elderly, has no safe options in a Gaza devoid of bomb shelters. Whole apartment buildings are being completely destroyed because a rocket was fired from their vicinity. The local Palestinian population may have been unaware of the weapon emplacement and, in any case, neighbors had no control over the use of the nearby missiles. Attacks on Palestinian homes are a textbook case of collective punishment, acts that dismiss the humanity of the Palestinian enemy.

In her new book, *Contested Land, Contested Memory* [1], former *Catholic Worker* editor Jo Roberts explains the Israeli need to control the narrative as well as the facts on the ground. Israel's defenders highlight the Shoah, the Holocaust, but they refuse to acknowledge the historic and ongoing Palestinian Nakba, the dispossession of the Palestinians in building the Israeli garrison state. "The wounds of the past loom in the [Israeli] collective memory, obscuring the suffering of others," she writes. "The land is a safe haven for Jews, not the site of Palestinian catastrophe."

The Likud political party began as a militant nationalism, believing Israel's future would be won only at the end of a gun. Without an enemy, the leaders of Likud and its right-wing allies cannot maintain a national identity that continues to assert itself by taking possession of ever more Palestinian land. While it has become somewhat less belligerent than its right-wing coalition partners, the aggressive policies of deprivation of land from the Palestinians and occupation of their lands by radical settler groups have been abetted by the Likud-led governments of Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu. The Arab enemy is necessary to keep the world from looking too closely at Israel's record of illegitimate acts.

Only negotiations in which the two sides meet as equals, as other insurgents have with their onetime rulers, will lay the foundations of a lasting peace. Equality at the negotiating table will be the first step toward uprooting the anti-Palestinian prejudice at the root of the conflict. As long as potential conciliators, like Secretary of State John Kerry, accept the Israeli premise that everything must be negotiated without preconditions, neglecting the limits set down by international law and prior agreements, there will be no equality at the negotiating table and no just peace. Preserving the inequality between the two sides guarantees a future of violence and unrest.

[Jesuit Fr. Drew Christiansen is former editor of *America* magazine and a professor of ethics at Georgetown University. Ra'fat Aldajani is a Palestinian-American writer and commentator.]

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