

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

1. My name is Vanessa Pool. I am a citizen of the UK. I first began reading about what had and was still happening to the Palestinian people over 40 years ago. I knew then that at some point I would have to be more involved and to do what I could to draw attention to what was happening.
2. What can – and should – the UK do, in co-operation with regional and international partners, to help bring about a ceasefire?
  - i) My starting point is the title The Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is not a fight between equals. Israel holds all the power and the finance. The Palestinians want to survive. They did not start this. The title diminishes the experience we are hearing from the Palestinian people themselves who, despite the reporting restrictions placed on them by the occupying force and deliberate interruptions to services such as the internet, are getting their voices heard by those who will listen. We mustn't buy into the false narrative being put out by the Israeli government. So first the UK needs to listen.
  - ii) Even without the voices of Palestinians the shocking figures of the numbers of those who have been killed and maimed by attacks from the occupying force speak for themselves. So, in addition to listening, the UK needs to read evidence and watch footage that is coming out of Palestine from brave individuals some of whom have subsequently lost their lives in the attacks. Cruel is the only word I can find to describe the Israeli leadership. This is played out in videos showing troops celebrating and tourists being shown round the West Bank by settlers and invited to appreciate how they have driven the indigenous people out and taken over their land.
  - iii) We need to challenge the language of war. It isn't a war. It is a genocide. You cannot wage war on a country you occupy. You should be magnanimous in occupation. Make sure that people are not starving, that people are not dying of thirst and hunger. Make sure that medical help is available. That starts with protecting and respecting health care professionals, not targeting them.
  - iv) Another aspect of language we need to be careful about is to use appropriate words e.g. People killed rather than 'lives lost'. I have noticed that Israeli deaths were described differently from Palestinian lives. E.g. adding the word tragic. Words that lead the reader to sympathise with one side rather than another. All deaths are tragic and shouldn't happen at the hands of any deliberate actor.
  - v) If you do all this, you will be able to see that our approach needs to change. If we change our approach, we can be a model for others.
  - vi) We need to look at which countries we co-operate with and why. Most countries around the world will understand what I am saying here. Sadly, we have too often bowed to pressure from countries (like the US but there are others) who cannot separate their own financial and power interests from their moral and ethical obligations as major players in the world. By learning from all of this and from past failures the government will be in a position to act morally and ethically and be on the right side of history.

3. What can be learned from the record of UK Government policies to date?

My starting point is the British Mandate: they couldn't reconcile their contradictory standpoints over Palestine, found it too difficult and handed it over. From that point Palestine was made vulnerable to the forces gathering around it. Since then, we have stood by while Israel has gradually and forcibly taken over a large part of the territory and it will not stop unless the international community in which we could be a prime mover steps up. We have seen the UK Government threaten to weaken some of the policies we should be implementing, e.g. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We have not seen the government stand up to the aggressor.

4. How can the UK assure the resilience of efforts to bring about a lasting peace at a time of uncertainty caused by conflicts elsewhere and changes in leadership in the international community.

i) Resilience comes from going back to basics and examining openly what is getting in the way. Israel has gone on oppressing and occupying Palestine for decades. The cruelty they have already demonstrated and the way they justify it shows that they will not be able to stop by themselves without pressure from other countries especially the Western Governments that are still funding these atrocities.

ii) The political situation in other countries won't change this. We must stand up to oppressive practice. If we can't lead in this, we need to examine very carefully what is stopping us. Are we too allowing our own vested interest to get in the way of peace and reconciliation starting with a ceasefire?

iii) There are things we can do.  
Stop buying into the lies. Tell the Israeli Government we don't buy into their lies. Can our ambassadors find the words to say this?

Put out a call for people to disinvest in Israel.

Support rather than vilifying people who are boycotting goods and services.

Stop issuing arms licences.

Resist efforts to criminalise people who speak truth to power.

We also need to take a long hard look at MPs who openly state their friendship with Israel. Are they acting ethically and within the law?

Read the testimonies of Jewish people who are appalled by what the Israeli Government is doing. People who have made this country their home are ashamed, as am I, by what is happening in their country and in their name.

There are Jewish Palestinians, Christian Palestinians, Palestinians who are Muslim still alive today who know that it was and is possible to live in harmony and share the land.

Jewish people are leaving Israel, the very people that will be needed to rebuild their nation when the occupation and killing has stopped. Even among Jewish families who have lost loved ones there is recognition that the collective punishment being doled out on the Palestinians is unjust.

Conclusion.

The biggest myth promulgated by the Israeli Government is that force and killing brings peace and security.

We need the will to stand up to the aggressor in the courts and in all our dealings with other governments.

We should not be trying to predict/control the outcome of the peace process. The outcome in terms of what state(s) emerge(s) should be determined by the local population.

We need to accept the Israeli Government will not stop doing what it is doing just because we ask nicely. They won't be able to change their behaviour without active pressure from the rest of the world. We can lead the way in this.

I am calling for three fundamentals that we need for justice and peace:

Recognition for Palestine as a State

The right for Palestinians to return to their homeland

The right to live free from occupation

Additional information: I understand that the UN High Commissioner's Office for Human Rights (OHCHR) has a report due out on 1 January 2025, concluding that the attacks on Gaza's healthcare amount to the crime of Extermination.

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