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A voice for the youth of Israel & Palestine

“I would like my future to be in a calm and peaceful country. Also, I want to be free like any youth in the world and want to find a suitable job. I think urgent and serious work is needed from all governments in the world to end the occupation. The young generation in both Israel and Palestine should put pressure on both sides and raise their voices, saying “enough is enough.” **Fatima, 19**

“The current situation where we are ignorant and unacquainted with one another allows situations of insecurity. I think when we try to control people and justify it for security reasons we should ask ourselves: is this the right thing? Are we truly free when we control another people?” **Noa 19**

These messages were gathered in support of the 2017 World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel (WWPPI), a project of the World Council of Churches that Pax Christi helps to coordinate in the UK. Fatima is a young Palestinian woman, studying in Bethlehem. Noa is a young Israeli woman, recently imprisoned for her conscientious objection to serving in the Israeli Defence Force.

For the people of Israel and Palestine this is a year of anniversaries, commemorations and unfinished business. November sees the 100 anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, which promised a national home for the Jewish people AND an understanding that *“nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”* June marked 50 years of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and this year it is ten years since a blockade in Gaza was imposed. What must it be like for young Israeli’s and Palestinians who for three or four generations have known nothing but occupation, division and injustice? For the Palestinian community this has meant, among other things, increased confiscation of land, house demolitions, child-detention and the violation of the rights of free movement. For the Israeli community it means a deepening of a culture of fear, a militarised society and more of its young people being drafted into the military. A potential melt-down of hope within both communities.

While these problems call for political solutions - within the region and at international levels - they also call for ordinary people, civil society, to raise their voices about the kind of future they wish to see. Fatima and Noa’s messages are inspiring examples of the calibre and quality of thought among a new generation who want to move beyond fear and division. They need to be given the power and space to turn their visions into tangible political and social gains. Hence the theme chosen for WWPPI 2017 is ***Voices of the young... visions for the future***, inspired by the prophet Joel, *“your sons and daughters will prophesy... and young people will see visions”*.

The WWPPI is a time when people of faith around the world are encouraged to make a common witness that supports peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians. This year it offers a chance to hear voices of young people from Palestine and Israel and to amplify them in our church communities. A webpage offers stories, powerpoints and video links

which can be downloaded and used in schools and parishes.

What can you do? Arrange a service, assembly or time of prayer in your community during the week. If you have students or young people in your area from the Holy Land, invite them to a social evening, offering them time to share their stories. Write to your own Member of Parliament with the message, 'enough is enough' stressing that this is the time for a renewed commitment to the end of the violence and to reach a just and sustainable solution for Palestinians and Israelis.

More on the week here: <http://paxchristi.org.uk/campaigns/israel-and-palestine/world-week-for-peace-in-pi/>

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