

New Hope for Palestine, the Middle East & the World

An Advent Plea from our Sisters & Brothers in the Land of Jesus' birth

[Excerpted from Kairos Palestine's *Christmas Alert*. For the full meditation:
kairospalestine.ps/images/kairos-palestine-christmas-alert-2018.pdf.]

Advent is a time to turn toward Bethlehem and behold the occupants for whose sake the savior was born, those who still live under occupation, denied their freedom, dignity and independence. Advent calls all who espouse justice and peace to allow the people of Bethlehem to rejoice at Christmas by working for the restoration of their dignity, freedom and independence.

God is love, not a god of armies and wars, nor a god who orders one people to oppress another, nor a god that strips one people of their land and gives it to another. This is a season for refugees. Jesus took refuge in Egypt as a child when he escaped the oppression of the powerful of that time. Jesus



walks today among the crowds of refugees; he walks with them and for them, teaching, healing, granting life and directing the attention of the strong to stop killing and displacing people. Jesus tells the leaders of the world to sheathe their swords and turn them into tools for life, as the prophet said (Isaiah 2:4).

H.B. Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Co-Author of the Kairos Palestine Document

The First Sunday of Advent

Challenging Palestinian Displacement and Dispossession

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), the situation in the Middle East remains volatile. After more than six years of conflict in Syria, there are over five million Syrian refugees in the region and beyond. Violence and instability in countries such as Iraq, Libya and Yemen are triggering new waves of displacement.

In addition, this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe), the displacement and dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Today, Palestinian society is highly fragmented and scattered all around the Middle East and the world. Its social fabric has been torn as a result of this mass forced displacement. In the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinian “host society” has been challenged to integrate and accommodate huge numbers of their own population within their social, economic and political system. The near impossibility of this task, given the

reality of living under military occupation since 1967, is easy to imagine. Today Palestinians, whether displaced or not, share a common history and heritage of displacement. Many Palestinian academics argue that Palestinian culture has transformed into a culture of forced displacement.

In times of overshadowing political decisions like the U.S. administration's cut of funding to the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA), moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and cutting funding to Palestinian hospitals, it is important to focus on a legally-based approach to end the displacement and

“Our presence in this land, as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, is not accidental but rather deeply rooted in the history and geography of this land, resonant with any other people to the land it lives in. It was an injustice when we were driven out.”

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Chapter 2.3.2

dispossession of Palestinians. In fact, ongoing disrespect for international law in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict undermines the foundation of human rights, humanitarian law and international criminal law.

For example, it should be unacceptable to refer to Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory as “undermining efforts towards peace”—as is regularly the case in political circles. In reality, these settlements constitute a violation of numerous international standards and principles.

A solution to the ongoing displacement and oppression of the Palestinian people should be founded on a strict rights-based approach. Such rights are not guaranteed through political negotiations, but through full adherence by all parties to and implementation of international law and rights—for the sake of both Palestinians and Israelis.

Amjad Alqasis, human rights lawyer, legal researcher, and a member of the Legal Support Network of BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights.

Reflect: Imagine being forced to leave your home, your community. What would you take with you? What memories would you cherish?

Pray: Holy One Incarnate, I remember that as a child you were spirited off to a distant and unfamiliar place. Be with all those who are suffering as refugees, longing for home as well as food and shelter and a future for their children. In Jesus' name.

Act: This week, find out and share in what ways your faith community is helping to relieve the suffering of refugees. Learn more about Israel's incarceration of Palestinian children (“No Way to Treat a Child”, www.nwtac.dci-palestine.org).