

## Justice for Palestine

The following additional editorial is from the following members of the ANZSW Journal Editorial Collective: Neil Ballantyne, Liz Beddoe, Kerri Cleaver, Yvonne Crichton-Hill, Ian Hyslop, Eileen Joy, Emily Keddell, Deb Stanfield and Shayne Walker. It has been written to express unconditional solidarity with the people of Palestine at this pivotal time in history. We are horrified by the indiscriminate death and suffering, as Gaza, walled off from a watching world, is (once again) bombarded by the Israeli military machine. There are no adequate words. Homes, refugee camp apartment blocks, bakeries, hospitals, schools, and ambulances have all become sites of screaming children and bloody suffering: unnecessary, pointless, *heartbreaking* terror. These are war crimes as defined by international law, through conventions, treaties, and customary law (Médecins Sans Frontiers, n.d.; International Community of the Red Cross [ICRC], n.d.).

We condemn the disproportionate horror perpetuated by the Zionist Netanyahu regime and we condemn the tepid response of social work bodies locally and globally. Statements from the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW, 2023) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2023) do not appear to recognise that this is a struggle between an occupied people and an oppressive colonial state. We don't condone the violent incursion, killings and kidnappings carried out by Hamas which unleashed the current fury of the Israeli state, but we unreservedly condemn the genocidal collective punishment of the Palestinian nation. We condemn the collusion of Western Europe, particularly the UK government and we condemn the way the US especially has unconditionally bankrolled a system of occupation and apartheid that has been systematically entrenched since the founding of Israel 75 years ago. We are sickened and appalled by the hypocrisy of the Western

liberal powers. The mask has been torn. In December 2023, live on television, we are witnessing the US and its allies accept and obscure this horror in the name of geopolitical self-interest. Is this the world order we condone and celebrate?

Where there is occupation and oppression, there is resistance. The right to resist military occupation is recognised by the Geneva Convention (ICRC, 2002). Palestinian resistance will not be crushed by the indiscriminate killing of people shut in the enclosed prison which Gaza has become. The notion of destroying Hamas by bombing and shelling a densely packed, trapped, sick, hungry and desperate civilian population is as illogical as it is grossly inhumane. There is no safe place in Gaza. The world has watched as over 15,000 Palestinians have died: over 6,000 of the dead are defenceless children and the numbers tick over by the hour (Sawafta & Flick, 2023). Women are giving birth in hospitals without lights, anaesthetic or sanitation; the acutely ill are dying in pain (Ali & Chughtai, 2023). How does this make Israel more secure? The children who survive this living hell will not simply learn to fear an all-powerful Israel: they will be inscribed with a legacy of suffering, injustice and struggle.

If social work has anything useful to say in a world of division and inequality, where the security of capital and the political interests of the powerful allows for this barbarism, it must call for justice for Palestine. Social Work Associations, including the International Federation, like to be aligned with the abstract idea of social justice, but in reality are all too often complicit in oppression by taking neutral positions - calling for 'both sides' to develop mutual understanding and resolve differences. These messages are weak and unprincipled. They ignore the disparity of power. This is no time for neutrality. There is no neutrality in

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the face of the current slaughter. There is no neutrality in the face of genocide.

Many will argue, correctly, that the internal politics of Israel and of the wider region are complex. Oppression, revolt and asymmetrical warfare have shaped a long trail of suffering since the violent post-war partition of Palestine: the six day war which led to the occupation of Gaza, the Yom Kippur war, the Intifada uprisings. However all of this resistance and the cycle of punitive repression which has followed, stems from the same festering root of political and material injustice – the confiscation of land and the dispossession of the Palestinians to make way for the state of Israel. Agitation for the creation of an Israeli state was spearheaded by Zionist ideology as espoused by founding father and first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion who described all Israelis as part of a standing army. Golda Meyer famously claimed that there was no such thing as Palestinians. The hawkish military strategist Ariel Sharon founded the Likud party to which Netanyahu is heir.

Netanyahu continues to show no concern about the current war crimes, no interest in abiding by international law and no interest whatsoever in Palestinian statehood. The Israeli far right has always been quick to label any critique of Israel as antisemitic, invoking the moral revulsion of the Nazi holocaust. However, many Israelis and members of the Jewish diaspora internationally, reject the ongoing Zionist vision of an expanded biblical homeland – the colonial ideology that justifies a continuing settler push into the West Bank. The genocide must stop and we have to shout this from the rooftops. Joe Biden and other Western leaders have blood on their hands.

The idea that Israel can only be made secure from terrorist threats by more arms, more security, more US money is a toxic circular delusion. Israel exports arms and the technology of hyper-security across the globe, including the militarisation of Police

forces in the U.S. (Loewenstein, 2023). Global justice in an unequal world is not served by the proliferation of weapons, prisons, and surveillance. There is common cause. The American Black scholar activist Angela Davis has suggested the current plight of Palestinians - how we do or don't respond, where we do or don't stand – presents a moral litmus test for social justice across the world (“Angela Davis: Palestine”, 2023).

The violent displacement of the Palestinian people is a fundamental historical structural injustice which must be addressed. There will be no fair and lasting resolution until there is a free sovereign Palestinian state. We are witnessing a magnified eruption of the colonial logic of elimination; a logic that is inscribed in all the smaller acts of human rights violation directed to the management of the ‘Palestinian problem’. It was Mandela who said that South African freedom could not be complete without the freedom of the Palestinians (duPlessis & Tassiem, 2023).

Israel isn't about to disappear from the map. This isn't a realistic or appropriate goal but the politics of the relationship between Israel and the West must be reconfigured. The US and Western Europe should be imposing sanctions rather than providing financial, military and political support to an oppressive regime. The hypocrisy of this position is not lost on the wider world. The current unconditional support for Israel is intolerable and the ‘self-defence as a justification for mass killing’ narrative is gut-wrenching.

Angela Davis is right. We are indeed at a crossroads in terms of global social justice and human rights. If social work can't advocate for a just settlement, if it can't name the abuse of power and self-interest that perpetuates the suffering of the Palestinian people, the global profession is morally bankrupt and simply part of the problem. The plight of Palestine is the legacy of a deep history of global imperialism and the Western world is deeply implicated in the

current horror. We must all speak and act in solidarity with the Palestinian right to freedom and self-determination – we must all do what we can to stand on the right side of history.

In line with the Australian Social Workers for Palestine Position Statement we call for:

- A permanent ceasefire now.
- Immediate release of all children held as prisoners by Israel.
- The return of all hostages held by Hamas and Israel.
- Social work organisations globally, including the ANZASW and The Israeli Union of Social Workers to condemn the actions of the Israeli government.
- The New Zealand government to condemn Israel's war crimes.
- For the International Criminal Court to hold all perpetrators of war crimes to account.
- An International sanctions regime to break the systemic apartheid, occupation and genocide of the Palestinian people.
- International solidarity to provide a viable process for Palestinian self-determination.

There are no adequate words for the plight of Gaza but we simply cannot be silent. Lastly, from the pen of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish:

*We Palestinians suffer from an incurable disease called "hope".*

*Hope for liberation and independence.*

*Hope for a normal life where we shall be neither heroes or victims.*

*Hope to see our children go to school without danger.*

*Hope for a pregnant woman to give birth to a living baby, in a hospital, and not to a dead child in front of a military control post.*

*Hope that our poets will see the beauty of the colour in red roses, rather than in blood.*

*Hope that this land will recover its original name: "land of hope and peace".*

*Thank you for carrying with us this banner of hope.* (Darwish, n.d.)

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