

JERUSALEM

By Bishop Pat Power

Hardly a day passes without me being appalled by the plight of the Palestinian people and the apparent indifference of much of the Western world to the injustices suffered by these beleaguered people. I have to admit that before visits to the Holy Land in 1973 and 1988, my sympathies were with Israel whom I saw as a fledgling nation surrounded by hostile Arab neighbours. The scales fell from my eyes on those visits where I saw a heavy military presence in Jerusalem and other towns, armoured vehicles rumbling up and down the streets, threatening war planes flying overhead and on one occasion just escaping from a tear-gas assault in a busy alley-way in Jerusalem.

In the years since then, successive Israeli governments, with the seeming complicity of the United States, have become more and more emboldened in their violence towards the Palestinian people. The destruction of Palestinian homes, tearing down beautiful olive groves, building a dreadful wall which isolates Palestinians from one another and makes already difficult movement almost impossible, not to mention the barbarism committed against the people of Gaza in recent years are all examples of a major aggressor scorning any effort to find peace based on justice. Why else would Israel be so consistently in breach on United Nations' resolutions?

At the end of February, I accompanied Ali Kazak, former Palestinian Representative to Australia, to an International Conference on Jerusalem, held in Doha, Qatar. The conference was convened by the United Arab League and hosted by the Emir of Qatar and attended by over 350 people from all over the world. I was surprised to find among the participants a number of Jewish Rabbis who belong to a group called Jews United Against Zionism. I was able to tell them of the number of Jewish people here in Canberra who have spoken out against atrocities perpetrated against the Palestinian people. I was proud to stand beside Bishop Michael Sabbah, the former Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and the first Palestinian to be appointed to that role. He unsurprisingly spoke strongly in defence of the rights of his people and of the violence to which they are being subjected.

The Doha Declaration at the end of the two day conference made a wide-ranging appeal for the protection of Palestinian people in Jerusalem and the upholding of their rights. "We reiterate that the forced eviction of the Jerusalem population by means of the Judaization plans, denying the rights, obliterating the history and heritage, usurping land, and confiscating properties are violations of International Law. Therefore we are calling on the International powers that are silent about Israeli violations to assume their responsibilities and oblige Israel to implement all international resolutions relevant to Jerusalem. Additionally, we are calling on all relevant agencies of the UN to assume their responsibility towards Jerusalem and its population, ensuring their enjoyment of their city, complete civic, economic and social rights, preserving its sanctities, historical landmarks and human heritage."

Australia's new Foreign Minister, Senator Bob Carr, in his maiden speech gave some moving historical examples of religious tolerance. It is my hope that he will raise the awareness of our Federal parliamentarians of the need for greater understanding of the injustices being suffered by the Palestinian people. Dialogue which is so urgently needed at the political, racial and religious level will never succeed while there is denial of the "facts on the ground". I tire of seeing our parliamentarians of all political persuasions unquestioningly supporting Israel's usurping of fundamental Palestinian rights. Much of the tension with Iran would be lessened if that country

were to see the Palestinian people being justly treated by Israel and the rest of the international community.

In a paper submitted to the Conference, I concluded, “ The 64 years of pain and suffering the Palestinians have endured are enough. The Catholic Church and other Christians have consistently cried out for peace and justice in the Holy Land. The Arab League has rightly demanded that Israel end the occupation and withdraw to the 1967 borders. Jerusalem needs to be secured as a city for all faiths with Muslims and Christians from outside Jerusalem being given the opportunity to pray in the Holy City. Provision needs to be made for the millions of Palestinian refugees by providing right of return and just compensation in accordance with UN Resolution 194. I plead for patience and restraint on the part of the Palestinian people, for good will, a sense of justice and practical peace-making actions on the part of Israel and a firm resolve on the part of the international community to broker a peace which is based on justice and respects the dignity and rights of all the people involved. I pray for the climate of trust called for by Pope Benedict and I pray that the God of Abraham will bless these steps towards a peaceful solution in the Holy Land.”

– Pat Power

- *(Pat Power is the Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn and long-time supporter of the rights of the Palestinian people. He is a member of CLA. This article appeared first in the Canberra Times)*



The photo shows Bishop Power with Rabbis from the Jews United Against Zionism group.

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