Hi John

Thanks for your email and your concern, which means a lot.

At the moment we are in a ‘wait and see’ situation, but Gaza is under constant attack and all water, food and fuel has been stopped from entering. Most Israelis are totally traumatized by the horrific events of Saturday, and most will have lost someone or be concerned about hostages, or have had their faith in the military protection they thought they had shattered.

The government who have lost face massively are just now relying on massive military retaliation to rebuild confidence. The effect of this in Gaza is cataclysmic. Gaza is tiny, the size of the Isle of Arran, and has 2.3 m people, 47% of whom are children.

I am not sure what is happening in the West Bank, I don’t know if the settler violence and Palestinian resistance is ongoing. Its not in the news.

People I know here in the north are shrunk in on themselves, not daring to lift their eyes or express an opinion, hoping for a cloak of invisibility. Things are very tense. Hezbollah has a lot of rocket power and Iran’s backing, but so far have been relatively quiet. They see the arrival of US warships as provocation, however.

I feel the whole situation reveals a massive failure in leadership across the world, particularly the western world and here in Israel and Palestine. Palestinians feel their plight has been forgotten. We have the tools in the UN declaration of human rights to behave according to the rule of law, but this is being massively undermined on a daily basis by attacks on civilians which go unremarked never mind unpunished. I have found the words of Francesca Albanese the UN special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories helpful. She says, ‘It is possible and it is necessary to stand with both the Palestinians and the Israelis without resorting to ethical relativism.’ And I believe this is what we must very carefully do. This means criticizing both sides, holding both sides in prayer but standing up for peace with justice, which has to mean rights for Palestinians who for 75 years have been denied them. At the same time, the right of Israel to exist and for its citizens to live in peace must also be upheld. I have written more about this avoidance of polarization in my most recent blog<https://wordpress.com/read/feeds/124022112/posts/4934907603>

Here in Tiberias, the hotel is very quiet, with occupancy below 10%. The decision will likely be made to close for the foreseeable future. Flights out of Israel are currently few and far between and in the next couple of days I have to decide whether to stay or come back to Scotland, along with Stewart Gillan, my colleague.

Something to tell Presbytery is that Christian Aid and partners, including the Church of Scotland are reviving prayers for peace in the middle east on Zoom on 24th October. A link to the Zoom can be got by emailing Andrew Tomlinson ATomlinson@christianaid.org Poster here: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/events/prayers-peace-middle-east>

Points for Prayer

* Remember the dead, the injured, the bereaved of both sides: each one made in the image of God
* Pray for leadership with vision, courage and compassion here in Israel-Palestine and around the world
* Pray for an immediate cease fire and humanitarian aid to Gaza, and for the safety of all hostages held in Gaza
* Pray for leaders on the world stage to behave with integrity, in accordance with international law and respecting the human rights of all
* Pray for those, especially peace activists who feel God has abandoned them, that hope is lost.

I find the Christian Aid prayer helpful:

Pray not for Arab or Jew,
for Palestinian or Israeli,
but pray rather for ourselves,
that we might not
divide them in our prayers
but keep them both together
in our hearts.

With thanks,

Muriel