

May 2020 — May oppressor and oppressed create a new society in God’s Holy Land

*Douglas Dicks, Facilitator for Justice and Peace Education
Presbyterian World Mission*

“... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

The world continues to grapple with anxiety and insecurity related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the staggering loss of life that the coronavirus is causing. There is a growing fear that this crisis may be used to usurp power or control in certain parts of the world, or worse — to trample upon the human rights of those most vulnerable.

In Israel and in the Palestinian Territories, talk of annexation of the Jordan Valley and huge swatches of land in the West Bank by the Netanyahu-led government has become commonplace. With three elections for prime minister in less than a year, this unprecedented period has now set the stage for a national unity government between the ruling Likud Party and the Blue and White Party of Benny Gantz.

Last year, [B'Tselem](#), the Israeli Organization for Human Rights in the Occupied (Palestinian) Territories, issued an interactive project, detailing Israel’s “encroachment upon Palestinian space over the decades, shattering the land into small, isolated units, and keeping Palestinians apart from one another and from Israelis.”

[Kairos Palestine](#), a representative voice of Palestinian Christians in the West Bank, issued a press release at the end of April, in which they stated that their plea over raising the alarm about this emergency government in Israel is rooted in the “logic of love”; a concern for the life and future of both peoples, with a firm hope that one day oppressor and oppressed can create a new society for all of the people of this land.

An independent United Nations human rights expert recently warned that the new Israeli coalition government’s plan to proceed with annexing significant parts of the occupied West Bank, including the Jordan Valley, will create “a cascade of bad human rights consequences.”

In my role as facilitator for justice and peace education, it is important that Presbyterians understand the dire consequences that such moves may have, not only on any future peace agreement between the two parties, but also on the entire Middle East. Suppose Jordan and/or Egypt would suspend their peace treaties with Israel? U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338 have always been recognized as the foundation for negotiations between the two parties. That entails the relinquishing of — not annexation of — territories acquired as an act of war.

A key component of my work at this critical time entails being a “critical presence” — a witness to the daily realities that continue to unfold in this part of the world.

Working with Palestinian and Israeli organizations committed to a “just peace” remains vitally important to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and church partners in the Middle East. Were it not for the genuine relationships we have maintained, and the partnerships forged over the years, our work would be in vain. We know there are people on both sides of this conflict who desire a better life, and a better future for themselves and for future generations.

We continue to wait, watch and witness to what is happening. We work toward the goal that God's desire for all of God's people is an abundant life — full of hope, promise and a brighter future.



[Douglas Dicks](#) serves Israel and Palestine as Presbyterian World Mission's facilitator for justice and peace education and as associate for ecumenical partnerships, working in conjunction with St. Andrew's Scots Memorial Church in Jerusalem and other partners in the region. (Contributed photo)



The Israeli settlement of Har Homa (Homat Shmuel), in the distance, continues to expand, cutting Bethlehem off from Jerusalem to the north and east. (*Photo by Douglas Dicks*)



The Israeli settlement of Har Homa (Homat Shmuel) looking north from Bethlehem. (*Photo by Douglas Dicks*)