

The Paradox Newsletter

by The Rev. Tony Higton

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Ministry in Israel and the Palestinian Territories

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Paradox Ministries encourages Christians to understand and pray about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, seeing it through the eyes of both people groups involved, and taking the needs, fear and pain of both sides seriously. Its director, the Rev Tony Higton, who was Rector of a church in the Old City of Jerusalem for a number of years, circulates this email newsletter, speaks at seminars and encourages support of indigenous reconciliation ministry in Jerusalem. The newsletter is available free on request to those who add their email address to our Newsletter update list, available on the top of the ['Newsletter' page](#). Alternatively, send your email address and name to us via our online [Contact Form](#). Please encourage others to join the mailing list.
Tony Higton

Paradox Pilgrimage to Israel

October 26th November 4th 2008

Led by the Rev Tony Higton, with an Israeli guide and, **in addition to sightseeing, meeting some local people (Jewish and Palestinian) and thinking about reconciliation**

**1058 for 10 days
Half Board: all inclusive**

Includes Breakfast and Evening Dinner at 4 star-plus hotels plus all tips, entrance fees, etc (other tour firms have hidden costs). Only lunches and insurance extra. Prices are based on sharing a room which we can arrange, if you wish.

The tour will visit Jerusalem, the Shepherds Fields of Bethlehem, Caiaphas House, the Garden of Gethsemane, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Garden Tomb, Temple Mount, the Antonia Fortress where Jesus faced Pilate, the Pool of Bethesda, Yad Vashem, Masada, En Gedi, the Dead Sea, Qumran, Jordan valley, Sea of Galilee, Golan Heights, Mount Hermon, Caesarea

Philippi, Mount of Beatitudes, Capernaum, Nazareth, Valley of
Armageddon, Mount Carmel, Beth Shean, Caesarea, Jaffa, Ein Kerem.

PLEASE CONTACT TONY HIGTON VIA THE '[CONTACT US](#)'
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WILL THE PEACE PROCESS SUCCEED?

I do not ignore all the obstacles which are sure to emerge along the way. They are right in front of me. I came here, despite the concerns and doubts and hesitations, to say to you, President Mahmoud Abbas, and through you, to your people and to the entire Arab world: it is time. We no longer, and you no longer, have the privilege of clinging to dreams which are disconnected from the sufferings of our peoples, the hardships they experience daily and the burden of living under ongoing uncertainty, with no chance for change or hope

.I believe that there is no path other than peace. I believe that there is no just solution other than the solution of two national states for two peoples. I believe that there is no path which does not involve painful compromise for you, Palestinians, and for us Israelis.

So said Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at the Annapolis Peace Summit on November 27th. The Annapolis Joint Understanding on Negotiations stated: We express our determination to bring an end to bloodshed, suffering and decades of conflict between our peoples, to usher in a new era of peace, based on freedom, security, justice, dignity, respect and mutual recognition, to propagate a culture of peace and non-violence, and to confront terrorism and incitement, whether committed by Palestinians or Israelis.

In order to achieve this, Israel and the Palestinians agreed:

- To aim at a two-state solution, in accordance with the Road Map agreed by the Quartet on 30th April 2003. [*The Quartet: US, Europe, Russia and UN called for a two state solution, a freeze on Israeli settlements, PA action to stop terrorism, Israel to avoid civilian casualties, ease the humanitarian and economic plight of the Palestinian people and cease deportations; confiscation and/or demolition of Palestinian homes and property, destruction of Palestinian institutions and infrastructure*].
- To begin negotiations immediately, including about core issues such as the future of Jerusalem, the international border and the refugees right of return, making every effort to reach an agreement by the end of 2008.

- That (Palestinian President) Abbas and Olmert will continue to meet every two weeks.

George Bush, who sponsored the summit, and visited the Middle East, including Israel and the West Bank this month, is overtly supporting and encouraging the process. He has promised to make a return visit in May.

On December 17th representatives of 87 countries and organisations met in Paris and promised \$7.48billion to the Palestinian Authority, more than expected.

But what are the chances of success for the peace process?

HINDRANCES TO PEACE

There are numerous hindrances to peace:

1. **The rocket attacks on Israeli territory from Gaza.**

No sovereign state can stand by and see a constant barrage of rockets fired at it civilian centres without taking action. Since Annapolis this bombardment has increased, causing some injuries. Hamas, which was excluded from the summit, has been doing its best to undermine the Peace Process from the outset. At a Rejection Committee held in Gaza at the same time as the summit they affirmed:

- Palestine from the sea to the river [i.e. the Mediterranean to the Jordan] belongs to the Palestinian people.
- All Palestinian refugees must move back to their land.
- The whole of Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine.
- The Palestinians must continue to attack Israel and never accept normalisation with Israel.

Iran, of course, backs Hamas in this approach and rejected Annapolis. One reason was that, especially with Syrias involvement alongside other Arab nations, Iran, which wants to become the regional superpower, feels isolated.

There were 113 identified rocket attacks on Israel during December, 23 of them on Christmas Day. One rocket fell in Northern Ashkelon which is the furthest any rocket from Gaza has ever travelled. In response, Israel has carried out targeted killings within Gaza. On one such air attack 18 Palestinians were killed, most of them Hamas terrorist operatives. Among them was Hussam al-Zahar, the son of senior Hamas activist Mahmoud al-Zahar.

The continuing attacks have led to Israels controversial reduction of power supply to Gaza. Human rights activists in Israel and elsewhere claim that such targeting of civilians is illegal and could cause loss of life, because of its effect on hospitals, on the water and sewage system, on the use of household appliances such as refrigerators, etc. The UN Human Rights

Council has deplored Israel's grave violations of human rights in Gaza. However the High Court has declared that power reduction in itself is legal. Olmert says Israel will not target hospitals or allow a humanitarian crisis to develop in Gaza.

However, the situation has changed with the demolition of much of the wall the IDF constructed between Gaza and Egypt. Tens of thousands of Gazans have flooded into Egypt to obtain provisions. This is a major coup for Hamas which showed its discipline and sophistication in this carefully planned event. Unbeknown to Israeli intelligence, Hamas set explosives at 20 points along the wall.

Israel wants to avoid a major military intervention in Gaza because it would lead to many casualties on both sides, including amongst civilians. Hamas is trading on that reluctance to try to force Israel into a ceasefire. This would strengthen Hamas, which Israel definitely wants to avoid. Hence they are applying the economic pressure on Gaza to try to harm Hamas. Both the UN and the EU have pleaded with Israel to reverse this decision.

It should be noted that there is Israeli opposition to the peace process as well as that of Hamas. For example, there have been Israeli demonstrations against the prospect of the division of Jerusalem. 5000 demonstrators formed a human chain around the Old City walls. The chairman of the Temple Mount Faithful called for Olmert to be tried for treason because he was even discussing the issue. However a demonstration in Har Homa, a settlement just south of Jerusalem, close to Bethlehem, against partition drew only 2000 people. In 2000 demonstrations against partition attracted over 300,000 people.

2. The lack of Israeli action on removing settlements on the West Bank.

Israel did release over 450 Palestinian prisoners as a positive gesture after the summit. They also transferred to the Palestinians armoured personnel carriers plus rifles and ammunition.

However, soon after Annapolis, Israel announced it was going to construct 307 new houses in Har Homa. Currently construction is being delayed and this has led to demonstrations.

Is Olmert serious about peace? Some Israelis are scathing about Olmert, claiming that he is not serious about the Peace Process. As evidence they point, among other things, to the repeated promises to dismantle some of the outlying settlements particularly those constructed after March 2001 - which have not led to action, despite American pressure. During his visit Bush told Olmert: The outposts must be evacuated. We have been talking about this for four years. They are illegal and they have to evacuate them. Olmert assured him he would take action. Defence Minister Ehud Barak has reached

agreement with the leaders of 18 settlement outposts on peaceful evacuation to neighbouring communities. In any case the Israeli High Court is expected to order evacuation.

One Israeli wrote: The settlements are flourishing, 10,000 Palestinian prisoners are rotting in prisons, Gaza is starved and blacked-out, Shin Bet security service investigators are torturing, the checkpoints incarcerating. Another wrote: For 40 years now, Israel has been settling in the occupied territories while pretending that it is prepared to withdraw at any moment if only a chance for peace develops. With its own hands, Israel has been rendering the two-state solution irrelevant, while declaring to all and sundry that this is the only possible solution. The United States is not seriously demanding that the outposts be taken down - because if it ever had made such a demand unequivocally, the outposts would have been eliminated long ago. They claim that even if he is sincere, Olmert is afraid or feels unable to take tough action on the settlements which could lead to his political downfall. Already Avigdor Lieberman, Minister for Strategic Affairs has resigned from Olmert's coalition, taking his small right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu Party with him. Olmert still has a viable coalition.

STOP PRESS: As we go to publication, Olmert has frozen new construction on all West Bank settlements.

It has to be said that Israel is unlikely to withdraw from the West Bank whilst the rocket attacks from Gaza continue. Were such rockets to be transferred to the West Bank they could hit Tel Aviv and the airport. Israel is afraid of the possibility of having a terrorist state on its doorstep. It is a real cause of concern that simple rockets were recently discovered in Nablus (a West Bank town). (It should be noted that Hezbollah in Lebanon has rockets capable of reaching south of Tel Aviv. Two rockets from Lebanon hit the Israeli town of Shlomi in early January.

3. The conflict between Fatah and Hamas.

Despite attempts at reconciliation by Saudi Arabia, Fatah is refusing to talk with Hamas until it reverses its military takeover of Gaza. Fatah is taking action against Hamas and arrested 250 Hamas activists, including some from charitable organisations, claiming there are financial irregularities. The humanitarian wing of Hamas is appreciated by Palestinians because they provide essential services. Hamas continues to suppress Fatah violently in Gaza.

4. The weakness of Fatah in maintaining law and order.

On December 28th two off-duty IDF soldiers were shot dead by a renegade Fatah group.

However in Nablus the Palestinian security forces confiscated 120 weapons and a Hamas bomb factory. They have brought relative calm to the city after years of violence.

URGENCY

There is a certain sense of urgency about the Peace Process. President Bush stands down at the end of the year, as does Mahmoud Abbas in January 2009. Their successors may not be so committed to peace and may need to consolidate their position before being involved. Failure in the peace process is likely to strengthen Hamas and could even enable them to take over the West Bank.

PRAYER TOPICS

1. Pray for success for all those working for peace and justice in the Holy Land and that they will act wisely, sincerely and courageously.
2. Pray that rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza (or anywhere else) will cease.
3. Pray for the suffering people of Gaza that they will be set free from oppression, injustice and violent attack (including from their own government), and for the early restoration of power and fuel deliveries.
4. Pray that Hamas and other Islamist groups will see the futility of violence and the need to compromise
5. Pray that Israel will act on its promises concerning settlements.
6. Pray that Fatah will succeed in establishing law and order in the Palestinian territories.
7. Pray that by the end of 2008 a viable two state solution will be closer.
8. Pray for all believers in Jesus in this situation that they may speak, live, pray and act in ways which extend Gods Kingdom.

Tony Higton