

A message from Rev David Cameron, Convener of the Assembly Trustees on the Israel Gaza Conflict

Dear Friends, as many will know, the Church of Scotland has had a presence in Israel and Palestine for many years. Currently we have two Mission Partners in place – Rev Dr Stewart Gillan in Jerusalem, and Rev Muriel Pearson in Tiberias. Alongside that, we have around 160 locally employed staff at our three properties in Tiberias, Jerusalem, and Jaffa-Tel Aviv.

The attack by Hamas on Israel in the early hours of Saturday 7th of October has led to a dramatic escalation. As of the morning of the 8th of October, over 300 Israelis have been killed and around 2,000 wounded. Alongside that, around 50 Israelis are being held hostage, some in Israel, but many in Gaza, having been taken there by the Hamas militants.

Israel has responded with air strikes on Gaza, with a similar number of Palestinians killed and wounded.

Our staff are currently all safe, and we are in contact with them on a constant basis. Currently there are no plans to evacuate them from the area, but should the situation deteriorate further, all possibilities will be looked at. The main trouble is in the south of the country in the Gaza border area, but missiles have been hitting Tel Aviv and reaching as far as Jerusalem. The West Bank has seen clashes, as has East Jerusalem. Our advice to our staff is to remain in place, and ensure their own safety.

We are also in contact with as many of our partners as possible and providing any support that we can give. This is mostly a listening ear, but will, in the weeks and months to come, require practical support as they deal with the fallout from this war.

At this time, our prayers are for all of those affected by these horrendous events. They are with the families of those killed, both in Israel and in Gaza. They are with those who have been taken hostage. They are with those dealing with the decisions to be made in the days ahead. There can be no peace without justice, and we all must do what we can to bring justice to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Gaza.

This war feels like a breaking point. There is a context to all the attacks which is important, but there is no justification for them. The coming days are crucial as decisions are made which can either start the route to peace and justice, or lead to revenge and devastation, and much weeping and mourning.

The Church of Scotland condemns this violence, condemns the actions of Hamas, calls for restraint as Israel rightly seeks to defend itself, and calls for a swift resolution to this war which leads to a significant change on the ground to this long standing conflict. We pray for justice to prevail, knowing that violence can only lead to more death and destruction, so that all in the region may live in peace, Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Yours prayerfully,
Rev David S Cameron
Convener of the Assembly Trustees