

## Reflection

The conflict in the Holy Land is the concern of all Christians, who are aware that their spiritual roots lie in the land of Christ's redemption... We believe that the Churches can do still more. If all the Churches of the world recognize their duty toward the Holy Land, and if they all join together in common and concerted action to sensitize their governments, their people and the international community, their intervention will become a decisive factor in the attainment of peace, justice and reconciliation in the Holy Land. Our Churches have received from the Lord a ministry of reconciliation. We do not call you to take one side against another. On the contrary, we want you to help both sides find the way to reconciliation. We are calling for a new awakening in the Churches of the world, for a strong voice to be raised to promote peace in this Holy Land, where both peoples are in need of outside help in order to find peace and reconciliation.

Appeal by Bishops of North Africa and Arab Countries at the conclusion of the meeting of the Conference of Bishops of the Region of North Africa (CERNA) and the Conference of Latin Bishops in the Arab Regions (CELRA), October 19, 2004

## Prayer

Give us ears to hear, O Lord,  
to hear the cries of a people living under occupation,  
of farmers whose land has been taken,  
of parents whose children have been killed or wounded,  
of faithful Muslims and Christians barred from worshiping in the Holy City.  
Hear our prayers for justice and peace for the Palestinians.

Give us ears to hear, O Lord,  
to hear the voices of those who bear the scars of the Holocaust,  
Of mourners grieving the deaths of those killed in recent conflicts,  
of those who seek new ways of bringing reconciliation,  
Of those whose bright hopes for a "promised land" have ended in despair.  
Hear us as we pray for security and peace for the people of Israel.

Eternal God, merciful and compassionate,  
we pray for the people of Israel and Palestine.  
Surround them with the prayers of their sisters and brothers around the world,  
strengthen them to witness fearlessly for justice and peace.  
We pray for the Jews of Israel and the Jewish settlers  
We pray for the Muslims of Israel and Palestine,  
We pray for all the children of Abraham-Christian, Jewish, and Muslim-  
that justice and peace shall clasp hands and the "Holy Land" become truly holy.

Adapted from "A Service of Prayer for Peace in the Middle East," from a service at Hunter Presbyterian Church, December 19, 2000 <http://www.pepm.org/PrayerVigil/PrayerVigilServiceExample.htm>

## A Brief Timeline of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict



Source: www.bbc.com

**1880s:** The Zionist movement begins in Europe, with Jews desiring a homeland in Palestine (because it included Jerusalem and surrounding areas). Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire and was 95% Arab, (mostly Muslims and some Christians) and 5% Jew.

**1917:** The British take control of Palestine from the Ottomans. The British issue the Balfour Declaration, expressing support for the idea of a home for Jews in Palestine, but “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”

**1920:** The Sykes-Picot Agreement is put into action, dividing Arab lands between the various European powers. The Arabs are angered by the division of land.

**1920s and 1930s:** Jewish immigration increases and tensions between Jews and Arabs rise.

**1936:** The British propose to partition Palestine between the Arabs and Jews. Palestinian Arabs’ resentment leads to “The Great Uprising,” an upsurge in militant Arab nationalism. They engage in non-violent strikes and protests and some violence. Jews are upset that Arabs have been given more land, while Arabs think the contract favors the Jews when relative population size is considered.

**1941-1945:** During WWII, 6 million European Jews are killed in the Holocaust. After the tragedies are exposed,

international support for a Jewish homeland grows.

**1947:** The 1947 UN Partition Plan divides Palestine. The Palestinians and surrounding states reject the plan, saying Jews should not receive half the land when they are only 6% of the population. Arabs attack Jewish settlers.

**1948:** The Jews announce a Declaration of the Independence of the State of Israel. The U.S. supports the declaration immediately. Five Arab neighbor states attack Israel.

**1949:** The 1949 Armistice Agreements give 78% of Palestine to Israel. The Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the designated Arab areas, are controlled by Egypt and Transjordan. 750,000 Palestinian Arab refugees who live inside Israel’s borders are created. Palestinian Arabs who flee from Israel are not allowed to return and many are not granted citizenship in the countries to which they flee.

**1964:** The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) is created to work for Palestinian refugee rights and to win land back from Israel.

**1967:** In the Six-Day War, Israel conquers the West Bank and Gaza Strip, among other territories, from Jordan and Egypt. The West Bank and Gaza are still occupied and from this point on are known as the “Occupied Territories.” 200,000 more Palestinian refugees are created.

**1969:** Yasser Arafat becomes the leader of the PLO.

**1972:** The infamous Munich massacre occurs, in which 11 Israeli Olympic athletes are killed by a militant faction of the PLO. The terrible event leads to the eventual renunciation of violence by the group and the establishment of the PLO as the representative body of the Palestinian people.

**1987:** The First Intifada begins, an uprising by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories against Israel. The UN Security Council becomes involved and passes a resolution condemning Israel’s handling of the Intifada.

**1991 – present:** The Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, the Oslo Peace Accords (1992), the Beirut Summit of 2002, the 2002 Road Map for Peace, and alternative peace proposals have been negotiated by Israel, Palestine, the U.S. and other facilitators, often interrupted by militant violence.

Source: adapted from “History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” from the Wikipedia encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/>.

## Israel and Palestine: The Peace Process

The “peace process,” which has been happening intermittently since 1993, has involved negotiations by Israel, Palestine, the U.S., Russia, the EU, and the UN. In 2003, the “Roadmap,” produced by the above countries, outlined steps towards an independent Palestinian state by the year 2005. However, several things have prevented the Roadmap from moving forward:

- \* Israel continues to militarily occupy the West Bank and Gaza Strip, despite UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 in the 1970s, calling for Israel’s withdrawal.
- \* Israel continues to subsidize Israeli “settlers” to build settlements in those territories in order to establish Israeli control there. The Israeli government sponsors the demolition of existing structures where the settlements will be build, including the destruction of Palestinian houses that are already there. Furthermore, Israel began construction on a fence that it says is for security reasons, but which Palestinians say cuts into Palestinian territories and divides land and properties.
- \* Palestinian militant groups continue to attack Israeli police, military, and checkpoint officers, using alienating terrorist mechanisms such as suicide bombings, while Israeli police continue to attack Palestinian rebels. Exchange of fire often takes place in civilian areas, causing high numbers of civilian victims.
- \* The two sides are unable to agree on who will have sovereignty over Jerusalem, or to share it.
- \* The two sides disagree on what to do with 3.7 million stateless Palestinian refugees.
- \* **989 Israelis** and **3,354 Palestinians** have been killed in the conflict since September 1, 2000. **6,709 Israelis** and **27,925 Palestinians** have been injured.

Pope John Paul II stated recently that the only way to find peace is through negotiation. Citing the Holy Land and Iraq, he urged the world to stop turning to violence in times of dispute. The Pope has called for a stop to Israeli-Palestinian clashes numerous times, and this was the most recent. He said the world must turn away from violence “whether it is in Iraq, where the return to civil peace seems so difficult to establish, in the Holy Land, which is unfortunately marred by an endless conflict that is fed by reciprocal hate and desire for vengeance, or in other countries scarred by terrorism that cruelly strikes the innocent — wherever violence reveals its horrors and its inability to resolve conflicts.”

Violence, he continued, “produces nothing good, only hate, destruction and death. I once more urge the international community to take responsibility, to favor a return to reason and negotiation, the only possible solution to conflicts between men, because all peoples have the right to live in serenity and peace.”

“John Paul II Calls for Peace Through Negotiations, *The Associate Press*, September 18, 2004.

### Discussion Questions

1. How would you feel if you were someone on the Israeli side of the conflict? The Palestinian side?
2. What does Pople John Paul II say are the causes of violence? How does Catholic Social Teaching tell us to work against the causes of violence?
3. Many actions, listed above, have prevented the peace process from moving forward. In what ways do the actions by both sides violate the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and human rights?
4. What does Pope John Paul II say is the solution to the conflict? How can the U.S. and the international community help this happen?

Sources:

Global Policy Forum ([www.globalpolicy.org](http://www.globalpolicy.org))

Israeli statistics are from the Israel Defense Forces website ([www1.idf.il/dover/](http://www1.idf.il/dover/))

Palestinian statistics are from the Palestinian Red Crescent Society website (<http://www.palestinercs.org>).