



HEADS OF CHURCHES STATEMENT ON PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

It's time for the Australian Government to shift gear on Palestine and Israel. It's time for Australia to become much more active in the cause of peace in the Holy Land.

In this week of International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, we Australian church leaders call on our Government to give much higher priority to working for peace in the Holy Land.

The people of Israel and Palestine desperately need and want peace. The world desperately needs peace in the Holy Land.

Palestinians have suffered 60 years of dispossession, 41 years of military occupation, land confiscation and illegal settlements, and thousands of violent deaths.

Israelis have suffered 60 years of armed hostilities and constant threats, scores of suicide bombings and rocket attacks, and thousands of violent deaths.

Insecurity and polarisation are the chief features of life in Palestine and Israel. For Palestinians, disputes over land, roads, farms, water and military checkpoints go on and on; poverty, unemployment and restrictions on economic development hold sway. For Israelis the ever-present fear of suicide bombers and the threats from other nations in the region create daily anxiety.

After decades of conflict and tension, there is little reason for optimism or even hope. Resentment and hatred continue to grow. The cycle of violence continues.

In a major speech delivered to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute on 9 April, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Stephen Smith MP, gave an overview of Australian foreign policy. Eighteen countries received specific mention, but neither Israel nor Palestine. Yet the conflict between Israel and Palestine has for 60 years created worldwide tensions and generated hundreds of terrorist acts across the world.

We implore the Australian Government to increase its support for peacemaking between Israel and Palestine. We respectfully recommend that increased support include:

- persistent advocacy for a freely and peacefully negotiated solution acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians, whether in the form of two states or one;
- greater recognition of the plight of Palestinians after 41 years of military occupation;
- advocacy for the implementation of international law in reaching a negotiated solution;
- a quadrupling of Australia's aid contribution to the social and economic development of Palestine; and
- the facilitation of a multi-faith delegation from Australia to visit Israel and Palestine.

It's more than time for a concerted effort by the international community to work with Israel and Palestine to bring about a just peace. Australia, with its vibrant Jewish and Palestinian communities, is well placed to give a lead.

We ask all Australians to join with us in praying for justice and peace for the people of Israel and Palestine, and in urging greater commitment from the Australian Government to working for a just peace between Israel and Palestine.

Canberra, 4 June 2008