

## Department of International Affairs

### THE HOLY LAND 2000 A Brief Recent History

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales believe that support for the Church in the Holy Land is particularly urgent at this time. The situation facing the Christian community there is serious, and some of the problems are described in this leaflet. A more detailed document has been sent to parish priests, and is also available from the address on the back page and on the internet.

The Bishops are asking Catholics in England and Wales to support the Christian community in the Holy Land in three ways:

- by prayer - a sample prayer is included below
- by action - through support for human rights by those in a position to do so
- by finance - dioceses are asking either for an extra collection in Lent, or an increase in giving to the annual Holy Places collection on Good Friday

Lord God,

Console and strengthen all who suffer from division and conflict in the Holy Land.

Send your Spirit on those working for peace and justice.

Bless all who serve and preach the Gospel in the land where Jesus the Lord prayed, laboured, suffered, died and was raised to life.

Help us, united with them in the Body of Christ, to support them in their need.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

#### **Recent history**

The state of Israel was declared in 1948 after some years of British administration. Its foundation was surrounded by violence following the failure of a UN plan for partition. Arab countries refused to recognise it and some attacked. Since then, there has been frequent violence and occasional wars - a simple list of events is on the back page. The peace process made some progress in the 1990s, but the situation is still delicate and the suffering great.

#### **Christian community**

Around 10 percent of the Palestinian population are Christians. The Latin Catholic Patriarchate of Jerusalem is one of the Catholic Churches; there are also Melkites (Greek Catholics) and others. Since the Six Day War of 1967, 40 percent of all Christians have left Israel. Latin Catholics now number about 72,000 in the whole of Israel, Palestine and Jordan - less than half the Catholic population of Wales. There are few jobs, poor housing and great pressure to leave.

## Issues and problems

- Both Israelis and Arabs passionately claim Jerusalem as their capital. Almost all countries, including Britain, as well as the Holy See and the United Nations, say that areas such as East Jerusalem are illegally occupied by Israel.
- Palestinians are not counted as Israeli citizens. They require residency permits, suffer travel restrictions and serious disadvantages in housing, employment and other conditions of life.
- Israeli settlements in the West Bank and around Jerusalem are strongly disputed.
- Large communities of expelled Palestinians live in refugee camps in surrounding countries. Their return would seriously affect the local economies, yet is a clear human right.
- Water supplies are scarce and unevenly shared. Many Palestinian villages have water supplies for only one or two days a week, and in some areas, the water is not safe.
- A number of paramilitary organisations violently oppose Israel, so security is a constant concern. Serious human rights allegations are made against both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities.
- The average income of residents in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank is around £400 per year.
- The financial needs of the Latin Catholic Patriarchate are urgent because the Palestinian economy is so fragile, and the Church has many urgent social as well as pastoral needs. It is a major provider of educational and other social services for both Christians and non-Christians. The Christian community is being increasingly marginalised.

## Basic chronology

1914-1918	First World War. Collapse of Ottoman Empire, which had governed Palestine for 400 years
1922-1948	British Mandate governing Palestine. Increasing Jewish migration from Europe, particularly with persecution from the 1930s
1947	Civil unrest in the face of competing Jewish and Arab aims. United Nations partition plan proposing a Jewish state, a Palestinian state and an international zone including Jerusalem
1948	State of Israel declared. Attack by Arab states defeated. Start of exodus of up to one million Palestinian refugees
1949	Israel admitted to United Nations on basis that refugees would return - condition not yet achieved
1964	Visit of Pope Paul VI
1964	Founding of Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)
1967	Six Day War: Israeli victory over Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Occupation of Sinai, Gaza Strip, West Bank, East Jerusalem and Golan Heights
1970s and 1980s	Israel at war with Egypt (1973) and Lebanon (1978 and 1982). Civil campaign and violence, including Intifada against Israeli rule in Gaza (from 1987)
1978	Camp David Agreement between Israel and Egypt - Sinai returned to Egypt
1993	Oslo Accord: Israel and PLO recognise each other. Palestinians granted degree of autonomy in Gaza and West Bank - extended by Wye Plantation Agreement (1998)
2000	Visit of Pope John Paul II
2000	Deadline for talks on Jerusalem, refugees and settlements

This leaflet may be reproduced in Catholic parishes in England and Wales. It has been produced by the Department of International Affairs of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

A more detailed booklet is available from the Department of International Affairs, 39 Eccleston Square, LONDON SW1V 1BX (please send 31p SAE), and on the internet. A document for pilgrims to the Holy Land is also available.