A TOOLKIT

FOR CHRISTIAN REFLECTION ON ISRAEL-PALESTINE

The Council of
Christians and Jews

www.ccj.org.uk

Introduction

This is a short toolkit, based on 5 questions, to help shape Christian reflection around Israel-Palestine. CCJ are conscious that some Christians may feel called to speak about the conflict; to act as peace-makers, and to promote the values of love and justice throughout the world, in good faith.

But we are also aware that many Christians do not always know how to speak about the conflict without causing offence to other faith communities, and that statements about the conflict can be antisemitic and harmful for interfaith relations. We understand and appreciate the strength of feeling about the situation, but it is important to ensure that strength of feeling does not present a barrier to nuanced understanding or prevent engagement with diverse viewpoints. It is essential that any comment is rooted in active listening and learning to minimise risk of offence.

Antisemitism has increased exponentially in the UK following October 7th. We therefore believe it is important for Christians to consider how their words land with other faith communities here in the UK. This resource will focus on antisemitism as this is CCJ's expertise, but we also encourage readers to educate themselves about Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred and, indeed, all forms of hatred.

This guide is not about shutting down conversation or disagreement. Ultimately, this guide suggests a series of questions for reflection before making statements about the conflict, with a hope that increased sensitivity towards interfaith relations will help us all grow in understanding, dialogue, and friendship.

Who am I listening to and what am I learning?

- We advise that the first step before speaking about the conflict is to listen and to learn.
- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is extremely complicated and often highly politicised. Therefore, we encourage attentive listening to a diversity of perspectives and angles on the issues at hand.
- Practically, when producing a statement, we can ask ourselves: who we are listening to, what are the sources of our information, and are there perspectives which we have not engaged with (particularly those which we don't naturally align with)?
- For Christian-Jewish relations, it's important to listen to and learn from the Jewish perspective as well as the Palestinian Christian perspective.
- When using Jewish sources, it is important to establish to what extent these are normative for the Jewish community.
- We advise consulting a diverse range of news sources, and being aware of the nature of social media (being conscious of fact verification, distortion and misinformation).

Where am I coming from?

- Before commenting on the conflict, it's important to be aware of, and reflect on, our own context; whether that is our identity as Christians (and the language which comes with that), the history of Christian-Jewish relations (and the long history of Christian anti-Judaism), British involvement in the Middle East, or our own denominations' journey in Christian-Jewish relations.
- We might ask ourselves - what are the gaps in my context? Do I know enough to make an informed comment on the situation at the present moment? Do I have relationships with Israelis and Palestinians to guide my reflections?
- Reflecting on where we are coming from helps us to acknowledge the particularities of our perspective, and how this may be different to others. It is important not to generalise based on limited experiences or interactions.

What's the purpose of my statement?

- Before making any statements, we encourage Christians to reflect on their motivations for making it.
- We might ask ourselves – are my words calling for peace and helping that peace process by inviting others into dialogue?
- A foundational question to ask is behind all of this is whether statement is necessary, or are there other ways to foster dialogue and peace-building? A statement is not always the best way to help.
- It may also be helpful to reflect on what 'success' might look like as a result of this statement, and whether this 'success' is an expansive vision of peace for all involved in the conflict.

How might my words be heard?

- Before issuing any statement, it is vital to be attentive to and eradicate any antisemitic language, allusions or tropes.
- In order to do this, it is important to fully understand the nature of antisemitism.
- When assessing incidents which are antisemitic, there is an important difference between intent and impact. We might not intend to be antisemitic, but this does not mean that our words are not antisemitic (and does not excuse them).
- It is important to remember that words land differently for different communities. There are a number of terms which many in the Jewish community find offensive in relation to the conflict in Israel-Palestine, which Christians may not find offensive. It is important, therefore, to be carefully precise (especially around legal terms) and intentional with language. Language and specific terms should not be used flippantly or for incendiary purposes and concerns from the Jewish community should be taken seriously.

What can I do?

- What are some practical steps to take based on the reflections above?
- Before speaking about the conflict, please engage a broad spectrum of perspectives in the creation of statements, consult your interfaith friends and colleagues, and build a community of dialogue to avoid echo chambers.
- Beyond making statements, there are further questions we can reflect on, such as: What can I do to help the peace process? How can I actively promote dialogue in my local area? How can I model positive interfaith relations in my community? How can I continue educating myself and my community?
- For support with reflecting on these questions, and navigating more specific issues, please contact the Council of Christians and Jews and see our website for further resources.

Further Resources

- For further resources and specific guidance please contact CCJ directly at cjrelations@ccj.org.uk
- For additional reflections on Israel-Palestine and CCJ's approach see our 'Listening and Learning' resource.
- For additional guidance on antisemitism, see the 'Connected Communities' resource produced by CCJ and Churches Together Britain and Ireland.