



“This is not a conflict; it is a crime.”

Peter Makari
Executive, Middle East and Europe

At the beginning of this month, when many Orthodox and other Eastern churches marked Easter weekend, Palestinian Christians witnessed the “holy fire” in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem. That light originates in the tomb of Christ and spreads through the city and to the world on Holy Saturday, the day preceding Easter. For many, it is a miraculous light of hope that announces the hope of Christ’s resurrection.

May 2, Eastern Easter Sunday, was also a day on which the eviction of several Palestinian families living in the Shaikh Jarrah neighborhood, near Jerusalem’s Old City, was anticipated. The Israeli Supreme Court delayed its final decision on those evictions for a week and has since put off its decision until next month. In the meantime, the Islamic month of fasting, Ramadan, has ended and the feast holiday should have begun, but clashes between peaceful protesters supporting the families and Israeli police in Jerusalem over the evictions rapidly spun into an all-out Israeli military assault on Gaza and its people. At this writing, more than 200 Palestinians – approximately half of whom are women and children – have been killed in Gaza by Israeli airstrikes, and in excess of 1,570 Palestinians are known to be wounded. Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been displaced from their homes in Gaza. Rockets from Gaza have resulted in twelve Israeli deaths.

It is overwhelming and horrific to witness any more lives lost. Of the two million people living in Gaza, almost three-quarters are already refugees, having been forced from their homes and dispossessed of their property and rights in 1948 when Israel declared its independence. They live under a continuous Israeli blockade, which denies them basic needs, including food, nutrition, and access to a decent livelihood. The families in Shaikh Jarrah who await eviction are also refugees from that same period, which Palestinians call al-Nakba, or “the catastrophe.” UN Resolution 194 (1948) establishes the right of refugees to return to their homes or to be compensated for their losses, yet Israel denies them this right. The assault on Gaza has targeted civilians, homes and infrastructure, and

[violates the Geneva Conventions](#). The families of Shaikh Jarrah and the people of Gaza have no place to go.

In 2016, the U.S. [approved a decade of military aid to Israel](#), in the amount of \$3.8 billion per year starting in 2019. In early May 2021, the Biden Administration [reportedly approved](#) \$735 million in weapons sales to Israel. The U.S. deadline for filing taxes this year was Monday, May 17, in the midst of the current crisis, so the reality of our direct complicity in enabling the Israeli military was put into stark perspective. Last month, Rep. Betty McCollum (D-4th District, Minnesota) introduced a new bill, supporting Palestinian human rights ([H. Res. 2590](#)). If adopted, it would “ensure that United States taxpayer funds are not used by the Government of Israel to support the military detention of Palestinian children, the unlawful seizure, appropriation, and destruction of Palestinian property and forcible transfer of civilians in the West Bank, or further annexation of Palestinian land in violation of international law.” The bill is a clear statement that the U.S. should not support Israeli actions that deny Palestinian rights.

A leader of one of our partners, the YWCA of Palestine, said recently, “This is not a conflict, but a crime.” The U.S. can and must do more to use its significant leverage to find a way to end the current violence and to support a longer peace with justice. In order for the fire of death and destruction that now emanates from land called holy to become again a light of hope, the Gaza assault must stop, the humanity of the Palestinian people must be affirmed, and their rights upheld.

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