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## Human Rights and the Future of Palestine



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*The Very Rev'd Dr Gregory Jenks.*

In recent weeks many friends have asked for my views on the tensions between Israel and Palestine.

I am conscious of the proverb about those who visit *Jerusalem* for a week and then go home to write a book about the conflict; and those who stay for a month and prepare a pamphlet upon their return home; while those stay longer remain silent after they go home.

As someone who enjoyed extensive contacts with Palestine, Jerusalem and Israel over several decades—including time serving as a co-director for the Bethsaida Excavations Project on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee and various periods serving on the

teaching team at St George's College in Jerusalem (Dean 2015/2017)—I have tended to refrain from offering my opinion.

However, I have personal and professional connections with a range of Israeli and Palestinian people, including academics and religious leaders from all three faith traditions. Some of them are my closest and most intimate friends.

In this post I honour my relationship them them all, and seek to help other friends without such personal connections to Palestine and its peoples appreciate the dilemma faced by us all.

This post includes the opening section of a longer document which may never see the light of day. It passes no judgement, but seeks to offer some insight.

In what follows I presume what once would have been a novel idea, namely that individual persons and collective human societies have civil and political rights which derive from our dignity as humans and are not generated by a power advantage over others. A novel idea indeed, but one that is embedded in the international world order which has generated and sustains the conflict between Jewish and Arab societies in Palestine.

At the core of this conflict is not a competition for territory but a clash of identities.

As it happens, the protagonists are people with common DNA. At the biological level they are the same peoples. Over the course of a lengthy shared and partly dislocated history, the peoples of Palestine (all of them descendants of the ancient Canaanites) embraced different identities. Some of them retained their Jewish identity despite dislocation and absence from Palestine. Others discarded their Jewish identity while remaining 'on location' in Palestine. During the Byzantine period most of the latter identified as Christians. Following the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem more than 1,300 years ago all of them now identify as Arabs and the vast majority of them are Muslims.

Their shared DNA reveals their common history while their unresolved conflict reveals their divided identities.

I take it as axiomatic that Jewish people living in Palestine may organize their affairs to enjoy their civil and political rights.

For me it is also axiomatic that Palestinians have identical civil and political rights, including the right to defend themselves when attacked or when those rights are denied.



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It is also axiomatic for me that the indigenous Palestinians—with their unbroken history of continuous presence in the land—have a prior claim to undisturbed civil and political rights which constitutes a form of ‘Native Title’ (to use a term from current Australian law) which can never be extinguished.

Palestinian sovereignty was implicit in the League of Nations Mandate given to the United Kingdom after World War One and was subsequently reaffirmed in UN Resolution 181 which approved the partition of Palestine. It has never been surrendered or extinguished. Indeed it is affirmed by almost 200 UN member states which formally recognize the State of Palestine.

*The Very Revd Dr Gregory Jenks is Dean of Grafton and a religion scholar who has devoted his life to biblical scholarship. <https://gregoryjenks.com>*

*Views expressed reflect the author and not necessarily the body of APCVA.*



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