



## THE UNITING CHURCH HAS A LONG-STANDING COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING THE RIGHT OF BOTH ISRAEL AND PALESTINE TO EXIST IN PEACE.



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Advent marks the beginning of a new year in the Christian liturgical calendar. We begin with the world waiting, wondering what the coming of God will be like; and then comes Christmas, through which we learn so much about God's intentions, love, and willing vulnerability.

A year ago I wrote about the passage in Isaiah, in which the prophet awaiting God's coming writes "O that you would tear up the heavens and come down". I reflected last year that perhaps we needed to stop tearing up the earth, and to understand the meaning of the call: be still, and know that I am God.

Over this last year, the warring has not stopped.

It is over a year since we were utterly appalled at the actions taken by Hamas against civilians of Israel, including taking hostages, some of whom are still in captivity.

We are still faced with an appalling conflict, in which the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinians, thousands of Lebanese people and hundreds of Israelis have been lost, extraordinary destruction has been wreaked, independent reporting has been severely limited, and the conflict has continued to expand.

Displaced people have been moved again and again, with no guarantees of safety anywhere.

The lives and livelihoods of so many people have been left in utter turmoil. To make matters even worse, the United Nations relief agency for Palestinians, UNWRA, has now been 'banned' from operating in Israel by the Israeli government, which will cripple aid distribution and be extremely difficult to replace.

It is hard to see how banning the work

of the most significant agency providing highly monitored relief is going to advance the hope for an end to war.

It certainly doesn't do anything to dispel concern about the extent of the aims of the warring.

The Victorian Council of Churches Standing Committee recently made a statement about how "Christians and churches are entrusted with a ministry of peace and reconciliation".

That statement affirms that "there is no pathway to a just peace through ongoing killing. We urge a permanent end to all killing. We condemn acts of brutality and atrocities committed by those on both sides of the conflict. Such actions continue to form barriers to any efforts at lasting peace and continue to sow the seeds of hatred and fear that bear the fruit of lasting armed conflict. We call on the Australian Government and the people in our churches to support Israelis and Palestinians who are working for a meaningful, just and lasting peace".<sup>1</sup>

The Uniting Church has a long-standing commitment to supporting the right of both Israel and Palestine to exist in peace and has continued to call on the Australian Government to do all it can to facilitate a just peace in the Holy Land, including supporting the International Court of Justice in its measures to prevent genocide, supporting peace-making organisations and imposing targeted sanctions.<sup>2</sup>

As we enter this new Advent season, please continue to support efforts for reconciliation and peace in our local communities, and to call for a just peace and rebuilding in the Holy Land. At Christmas, may the good news of God dwelling among us continue to form us for the work and hope of peace.