

Fair Witness asks: Can Israelis and Palestinians Rise from Their Tomb of Violence in Gaza?

April 3, 2018

On Good Friday some thirty thousand Palestinian protesters, mostly groups of families, gathered on the Gaza side of the border for a “Great March of Return,” to demand their “Right of Return” to Israel.

Christians for Fair Witness on the Middle East was dismayed when what at first appeared to be a peaceful protest ended in the carnage we have become all too used to seeing in the Holy Land. Groups of young men, some of them known Hamas militants, threw Molotov cocktails, rolled burning tires and fired guns at Israeli soldiers, as they attempted to approach and possibly cross the Israeli border fence.

The IDF responded with live fire and other riot control methods, ultimately killing 18 Palestinians (at least 5 of whom belonged to the armed wing of Hamas) and reportedly wounding over 1,000.

Then came the usual mutual accusations. Palestinians categorized the IDF action as an outright massacre of peaceful demonstrators without acknowledging the armed Palestinian activists who threw rocks and burned tires and fired guns at Israeli soldiers at the border. On the Israeli side there was the usual strident support for the military and the placing of all the blame on “Hamas terrorists” without any debate as to whether the IDF respected the rules of armed conflict.

According to Fair Witness: “The responsibility for this latest outburst of violence is divided not only between Israel and Hamas but also Egypt and the Palestinian Authority. But who is blameworthy matters less than the fact that, as Pope Francis reminded us on Easter Sunday, in the Holy Land, ‘the wounds of ongoing conflict’ do not spare anyone, including ‘the defenseless.’”

Those in the international community who care about this tragedy will spend less time on assigning blame and more time on helping the Israelis and Palestinians find their way to peace talks and not leaving until a just final status agreement is negotiated. Because until there is a political solution, the carnage will continue.

In this Easter Season let us pray that the Israelis and Palestinians can leave behind their empty tomb of violence and recriminations and move on to a new tomorrow. One which is filled with peace and hope.

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Christians for Fair Witness on the Middle East

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