

## Advocacy Outline - WCC-EAPPI Easter Initiative 2024

As we witness the ongoing violence and injustice in the Holy Land and seek to stand in solidarity with its peoples struggling to find peace, the 2024 WCC-EAPPI Easter initiative lifts up the call to roll away the heavy stone of violence, war, and occupation, pain, and suffering, and to remind the world of what is needed to bring about peace, and to transform swords into ploughshares.

### Call for Action

We ask you to call on political and religious decision-makers in your countries to join in efforts to end violence, war, and occupation and bring about a just peace. Ask them to:

- call for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages and unlawfully detained political prisoners, the opening of humanitarian corridors in Gaza to deliver vital humanitarian assistance, and for respect by all parties for the God-given life and dignity of every human being.
- re-engage in active and sustained support of efforts to end the occupation and for a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, based upon the principles of international law.

### What can I do to help?

1. Speak out! Raise the issues covered in the talking points below publicly, in the media, through social media, and during conferences and presentations. The Easter Initiative highlights aspects of the current situation in the Holy Land and the need to overcome the seemingly endless cycle of violence to finally bring justice and peace to all people in Palestine and Israel.
2. Contact relevant diplomatic actors, elected members of your government, and Government of Israel interlocutors. Tell them that all people of the Holy Land deserve a life with dignity, justice, and freedom. Encourage your elected officials to engage church leaders and staff of the WCC-EAPPI in the Holy Land when your officials are visiting there.
3. Follow the World Council of Churches and EAPPI website and social media. Look for updates and use that information in your activities.
4. Learn more. Easter is a good time to not only look at the historical and biblical places but to also understand more about the situation in Palestine and Israel today. We encourage you to learn more about the situation of communities affected by violence, war, and occupation and show solidarity with those suffering and those working for a just peace. We invite you to take practical steps to be in a relationship with people through solidarity visits, delegation visits with WCC-EAPPI in the field, institutional partnerships, church-to-church programs, and advocacy.



## Talking points

### **Jerusalem**

**NEEDS:** Protection of the rights of religious communities and access to Holy Places; Halt to home demolitions; Fair treatment of all its residents irrespective of religion or nationality; and end to the occupation

- Jerusalem is a historical-symbolic city, revered by Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike, and is the spiritual center associated with age-old dreams for peace and justice. No religion can claim a monopoly over Jerusalem. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the greatest challenge facing those concerned about Jerusalem's future as a spiritual, tolerant, and diverse place.
- On 5 November 2021, the Latin Patriarchate issued a statement cautioning against the violation of the sanctity of Jerusalem and the people. The statement said: "The historic position of the Churches in Jerusalem is clear with regards to our denouncement of any attempt which makes Jerusalem an exclusive city for anyone. This is a city sacred to the three monotheistic religions and, based on international law and relevant UN resolutions, also a city where the Palestinian people, Christians and Muslims, have the same right to build a future based on freedom, equality, and peace. We also call for utter respect for the historic Status Quo of all Holy Places, including Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound."
- East Jerusalem has *de facto* been occupied by Israel since the 1967 war. *De jure* annexation took place in 1980 – as Israel passed a law annexing East Jerusalem – but has not been recognized internationally.
- Today 14 Israeli settlements are home to 230.000 people in East Jerusalem. The Palestinian population of the city faces discrimination, such as a lack of urban planning, building permits, and services while the Israeli authorities collect taxes from them.
- Dozens of Palestinians are facing imminent dispossession from their homes in occupied East Jerusalem, in a move to force them out and replace individual homes and entire communities with Israeli settlements.
- 20 percent of all demolitions, evictions, confiscations, or seizures of Palestinian properties in 2023 took place in East Jerusalem. In many cases, the forced eviction of Palestinians occurs within the context of Israeli settlement construction and expansion. Israel has expropriated 35 percent of East Jerusalem for Israeli settlements. Palestinian families who lose their homes have nowhere to go.
- According to the UN, some 218 Palestinian households across East Jerusalem have eviction cases against them, most of which were initiated by settler organizations. Some 970 people, including 424 children, are at risk of displacement.
- This year, Muslims and Catholic, Protestant, and Anglican Christians celebrate high holidays at the same time: Holy Week and Easter (24-31 March) and Ramadan (10 March-9 April). In addition, Jews and Orthodox Christians celebrate high holidays around the same time: Passover (22-30 April) and Eastern Orthodox Holy Week and Easter (28 April – 5 May). We call on the Israeli authorities to provide equal, free, and unimpeded access to Holy Sites consistent with the city's religious and historical status quo.
- Jerusalem, as a holy city for all three monotheistic religions, should rightfully be the center of worship and celebrations for everyone, but of the three million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, who are predominantly Muslims, only those over a certain age are allowed access to Jerusalem during high holidays, while others must apply for a hard-to-obtain permit from Israeli authorities. The



restrictions cause congestion and tension at Qalandia Checkpoint near Ramallah, and Checkpoint 300 near Bethlehem, the main crossing points that are part of the separation barrier. This is the case, especially during the Holy Month of Ramadan when tens of thousands of worshipers want to enter Jerusalem to pray. Due to the current crisis even more access restrictions and harassment of worshipers are expected during the high holidays.

- Moreover, Christians from the West Bank and Gaza have limited or no access to Jerusalem during Easter for worship and family visits. Holy Week and Easter in Jerusalem are marked with festivities that include scout parades, processions by religious clerics, and prayer services at the Holy Sepulchre and elsewhere that commemorate the events that unfolded with Jesus. Christians from the occupied territories lament the fact that they cannot be in Jerusalem during Easter.

## **Gaza**

**NEEDS:** Immediate ceasefire; Full access to humanitarian aid and funding; Protection of human rights; and end of Occupation

- Over 30,000 Palestinians in Gaza (including over 12,000 children) have been killed and over 70,000 injured
- 1.7 million people in Gaza are internally displaced (75% of Gaza)
- 2.2 million people are facing Crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above)
- 360,000 residential units have been destroyed or damaged (60% of the housing units in Gaza)
- 350 educational facilities have sustained damage (60%)
- 12 out of 35 hospitals are partially functioning
- 132 groundwater wells have been damaged or destroyed
- At least three churches and 208 mosques have been damaged or destroyed
- Latest numbers can be found at [UNOCHA OPT](#)

### ***The situation of the Christian community in Gaza***

- Around 850 Christians remain in Gaza today. They all lost their homes due to Israeli bombardment; and 24 persons were killed. They are part of one of the world's oldest Christian communities, belonging to the Greek-Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican parishes. They are taking refuge in the Orthodox church and the Latin church under dire humanitarian conditions; they lack food, water, and medicine; and they are under threat of bombardment.

## **West Bank**

**NEEDS:** An end to the forced displacement of Palestinians; A halt to settlement expansion; An end to the occupation

- In 2023, about 4,000 Palestinians were displaced due to policies and practices implemented by the Israeli authorities or Israeli settlers, all contributing to a coercive environment in the West Bank. These numbers are the highest ever recorded by UNOCHA-OPT for a single year.
- A total of 1,152 Palestinians, including 575 children, were displaced when the Israeli authorities



demolished or forced them to demolish their homes citing a lack of Israeli-issued building permits.

- 173 Palestinians, including 70 children, were displaced when the Israeli authorities demolished their homes on punitive grounds.
- 921 Palestinians, including 394 children, were displaced during Israeli forces operations, where 222 structures were destroyed.
- At least 1,539 Palestinians, including 756 children, were displaced from their homes or communities in Area C of the West Bank amid Israeli settler violence, access restrictions, and shrinking access to grazing land.
- 200 Palestinians, including 82 children, were displaced from H2 area and Masafer Yatta in Hebron, citing increased movement restrictions imposed on their communities by Israeli forces as the primary reason.
- [B'Tselem has documented](#) the forcible transfer of isolated Palestinian communities and families in Area C since October 2023
- In 2023 alone, 12,349 residential units in settlements were brought into the approval process, 26 new outposts were established and the retroactive legalization of 15 outposts was pushed forward. About 700,000 people now live in nearly 300 settlements and outposts in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

### ***Civil society: Palestinians and Israelis working together toward a just peace***

**NEEDS:** Protection of human rights workers, journalists, peace activists, medical staff

- Palestinian and Israelis are working together for a just peace. Learning about their efforts and sharing their information is important during this time of increased violence.
- Groups that document the situation on the ground and publish information: [B'Tselem](#), [PeaceNow](#), [Machsom Watch](#), [Adalah](#), [Yesh Din](#), [Ir Amim](#), etc.
- Groups that focus on dialogue, reconciliation, etc.: [Parents Circle-Families Forum](#), [Combatants for Peace](#), [Women Wage Peace](#) + [Women of the Sun](#), [Rabbis for Human Rights](#)
- [Israel-based civil society and human rights organizations call for a ceasefire](#)

