

Script for Aug 8th 2025 at Stow Church: Vigil for Peace The West Bank

Mike Mineter

This file contains the script I used, and in blue some text that I had to leave out due to time, and some links - both added in case of interest.

Excuse the informality of the grammar - I wrote it for me to speak.

I have included some of my photos of the places I talked about. Although these weren't part of the presentation on 8 August it seems helpful to add them to this.

introduction

thank you for the chance to be with you in this vigil

I am a member of several groups active for justice¹ for all who call the Holy Land home – groups both Christian and not. I am speaking on my own behalf.

I was asked to talk about the West Bank and my connections there, and the difficulties faced by Palestinians.

After a few introductory thoughts I will take you on a tour of some people and places.

Palestinians in the West Bank say their circumstances are very hard, life is difficult and getting worse, but every time they speak of this they then say it is nothing compared to Gaza.

I've been in the West Bank 4 times, between 2015 and 2022 and regularly am in touch with people there

Palestinians invite us - "come and see to go and tell"

They know seeing reality challenges what we have heard from our media for so long. (Additional sources of news include Israel's [Haaretz](#), and [Al Jazeera](#), [Middle East Eye](#))

A reminder of the geography of the West Bank - part of the occupied Palestinian territory – with Gaza

the River Jordan trickles from north to south from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea.

Its a trickle due to Israel's extraction of too much water – e.g. Israel's plantations on Palestinian land, often of the wrong sort of tree. Although the river borders the West Bank, Palestinians can't get near it. (pg. 10, "[Environmental Nakba](#)")

If you go west from the river you are in the West Bank and then beyond Israel and after a total of only some 30 miles, the Mediterranean Sea

The West Bank was occupied by Israel in 1967

let the tour begin

Bethlehem

Bethlehem is in the West Bank about 6 miles south of Jerusalem

Lets imagine a walk along one of the main roads, the Hebron Road, its route is from Jerusalem to Hebron passing near Bethlehem,

In gaps you see the surrounding hills - most are covered in concrete buildings - mainly blocks of flats

these are Israeli settlements (photo of Har Homa below)



the words settler and settlement are too comfortable

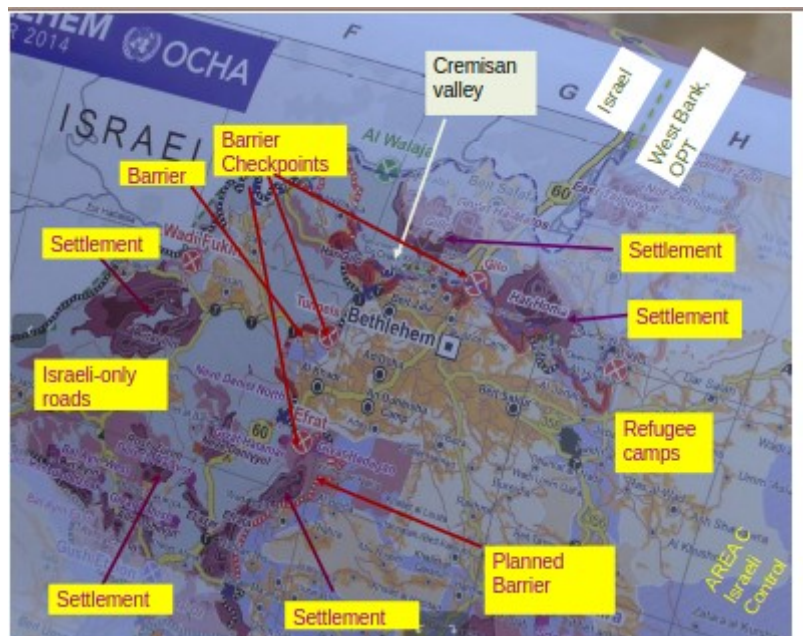
In international law it is illegal for an occupying power to settle its people on occupied land

This is one of the many actions for which powerful countries have failed to hold Israel to account.

more than half a million illegal settlers

in a total population of about 3 million in the WB

New settlements are planned - many have just been authorised



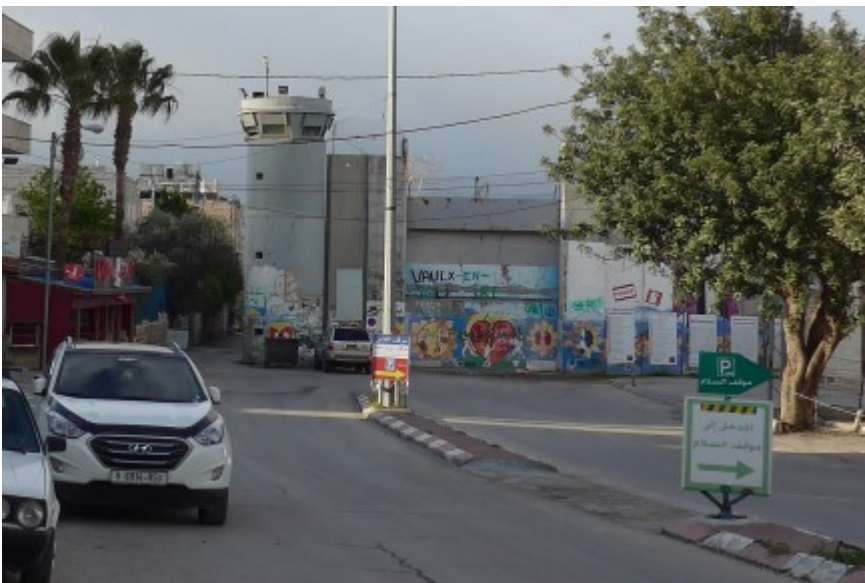
Many settlements are connected to Jerusalem by roads for use only by Israelis
Living in such a settlement is meant to feel like a suburb of Jerusalem

these settlements and their roads take Palestinians' land and are fragmenting the West Bank obstructing travel and farming

Of course we often hear from Israelis who assert all the land is theirs - the Palestinian history and people are somehow invisible.

Lets continue our journey on the Hebron Road
So if we walk along it towards Jerusalem we cant go far,

A 20 foot high barrier cuts across the road.... a concrete wall with watchtowers, built by Israel it is a barrier that stretches to left and right and keeps on going.



So what is the barrier really for?

Its being built by Israel and was begun in 2002 - with the claim it would isolate the West Bank Palestinians for security reasons to protect Israelis

But it is still being built with gaps that make a mockery of the idea this is built for security . I have stood in one. I could have walked through them.

Also

The Barrier's path is meandering - twice the length of the internationally recognised border between the West Bank and Israel 85% is on Palestinian land , as much as 11 miles inside ([see map from B'Tselem](#))

why ?

It goes around some settlements so although they are on Palestinian land the settlements are now on the Jerusalem side of the Barrier. It is part of a [policy](#) to create a Greater Jerusalem and to increase its Jewish Israeli population.

The barrier takes Palestinians' agricultural land and water sources onto the Israel side of the Barrier giving access and control to Israel.

It cuts through ancient olive groves and orchards, its construction demolishing trees. Access to what's left beyond the barrier, for their Palestinian owners is subject to permits

Palestinians can apply for permits - yes permits to access their own land.



(Israeli-only road above the barrier – the closed gate blocks access to what remains of the olives.)

A farmer explained Israel has a neat trick here

if land is not actively cultivated for 3 years - then it becomes state owned

This law had logic when created in the Ottoman period before the British mandate - it was to make land productive.

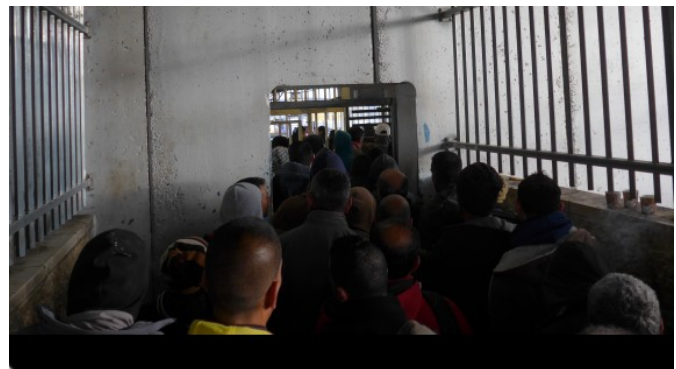
Now if permits are denied or access otherwise impossible then this law is used to take land from Palestinians

This barrier separates Bethlehem from Jerusalem

many people in Bethlehem had jobs in Jerusalem
to work in Jerusalem, a permit is needed - issued by Israel and shown at a checkpoint in the barrier

One known as checkpoint 300 was set up in 2005 and thousands go thru it - Or did until October 2023 when permits were revoked.

Crowds would form by 4am to get to work. It is designed to take hours to get through.



There are now hundreds more checkpoints - gates controlled by Israeli forces - on the roads.

These are scattered across the West Bank - open sometimes, closed another, no-one knows in advance.

Even a walk to collect a child from school can be obstructed and unpredictable with a checkpoint en route.

Among the several universities and colleges in Bethlehem, the one I know best is Bethlehem University. I love it.

The students have lives with imposed uncertainty and stress.

Getting to an exam or lecture could be obstructed by a checkpoint

Women especially are fearful of checkpoints

Students will sleep on a friend's floor in Bethlehem rather than risk commuting from home in places like Ramallah.

It should be a simple short journey, but not with checkpoints.

The university is an oasis of normality.

I've met people there and online and their positivity and desire to make a better world are terrific.

They like many others in Palestine and Israel - they seek peace through justice, not seeking vengeance

There is a crisis for students and the universities - because there is an economic crisis

Until October 2023 Bethlehem had two main sources of income

tourism

but there are no tourists for the last 22 months

work in Jerusalem

permits are revoked

Furthermore

fees and taxes paid to Israel should come back to the Palestinian Authority but are withheld. ([Times of Israel report](#))

A way for us to invest in their future is to give to the universities

There are several refugee camps in Bethlehem

Most of the refugees were displaced in 1947/8, from elsewhere in what was becoming Israel

Aida refugee camp is the one I visited

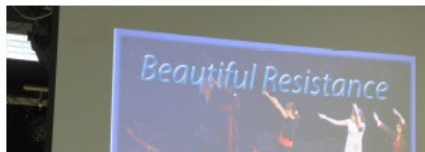
it has a wonderful arts initiative - performing arts - they have been at the fringe



Aida refugee camp

Established after the 1948 start of the Nakba

- "The most tear-gassed place on earth"
- "I was born in a refugee camp on my own land"



Last time I walked near at night I smelt tear gas and heard gunfire.

Israeli forces go in at will

often detaining children or just terrifying them

The consequence is social disruption and chaos.

The psychological effect of these night time raids, whether with detentions or not, on families and the children is hugeⁱⁱ

People working for NGOs such as [DSPR](#) speak of needing to re-child children to mitigate the trauma.

For example children think their parents can protect them, but in these middle of night raids parents can do nothing.

Thousands, with those from Gaza such as hospital workers, are detained without trial.

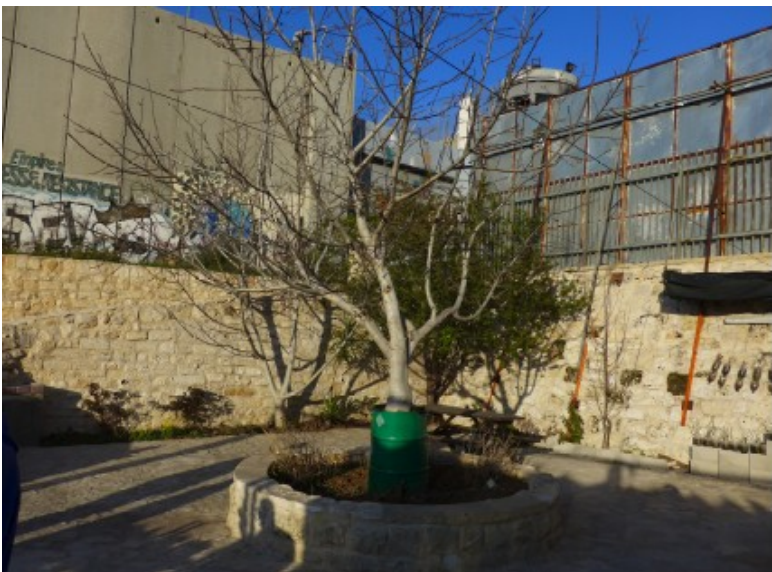
In our media they are called prisoners or more commonly ignored.

Reports from the Israeli human rights organisation BTSelem ([Welcome to Hell](#)), [Amnesty](#), [CNN](#) and [Israeli TV](#) have accounts of torture in Israeli prisons.

Exchanges of so called prisoners have been made with those also illegally held hostage by Gaza militants,
In the run up to one such exchange, a young woman I had met in the north of the West bank was detained, merely in order to be included in those released.
Middle East Eye reports that others were released.... then detained again.
Some are held indefinitely without trial or legal representation.

Adjoining the Aida refugee camp is a centre I love to visit called [Wi`Am](#)

Wi`Am, the Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center
Its in a building the garden of which was cut by the barrier.



Looking to corner of the garden, Barrier to the left, watchtower seen over the Wi`Am fence



This is the collection of spent tear gas canisters (from Wisconsin), sound bombs, rubber bullets collected from the Wi`Am playground
photo - 2016.

Two comments said to a group visiting Wi`Am:
The idea of restorative justice was outlined like this
Our host described watching two young children,
“the boy hit the girl
He said sorry
She said I don’t need sorry, I need chocolate
That is restorative justice”

Its more than accountability, its restoring right relationship

second comment:

“people ask me when did I become Christian, They assume our families had been Muslim. We weren't. I tell them my great great great great grandmother's great great great great grandmother was wet nurse to Jesus.”

The Christian records in Bethlehem and elsewhere in the land go back many centuries

A comment about refugee camps further north

Since mid 2023 the refugee camps in northern towns have had homes and streets demolished and [the UN reports](#) some 40 000 made homeless.

[The violence against Palestinians in the West Bank had been growing in the few years before October 2023 as settlers, including those in the government had become more aggressive – e.g. the attacks on Huwara.](#)

[There were even incursions by Israeli settlers at Al Aqsa Mosque and compound during Ramadan in 2021, 2022, and 2023 and around 3 October 2023.](#)

[The militants from Gaza named their 7 October attack “Al Aqsa Storm.”](#)

[Settlers have continued the incursions since October 2023, in Ramadan 2024, and in 2025 including on 29 April and 3 August \).](#)

Continuing south we come to the city of Hebron

a city with checkpoints, roads from which Palestinians are barred, and violent settlers protected by violent soldiers.

[The checkpoint onto Shehada St has a machine gun mounted - remotely controlled - someone said by AI but I don't know about that.](#)

[Methods of surveillance and weapons are tested on Palestinians - so Israel proudly sells its systems saying they have been tested....](#)

A little further south from Hebron are the South Hebron hills

many areas are being newly designated as Israeli military training zones which now means villagers are simply told to leave or buildings are demolished

I was taken there with someone from a wonderful group called HIRN - Hebron International Resource Network

[In 2016 I saw a school built in a matter of days](#)

[In much of the West Bank Israel demands permits be applied for and given by Israeli authorities before any building can happen. Building without permits leads to demolition orders being issued \(\[report on early 2023\]\(#\)\). When acted on, the owner is charged for the demolition unless they do it themselves.](#)

[Back in 2016 there was more of a mirage of legality](#)

[so materials for building without a permit could be confiscated but once built, demolition could be delayed in the courts.](#)

[And legal process gave the new school an expected lifetime of a few years before demolition would happen.](#)

[My guide said... the 1 state solution cant work, the 2 state solution can't work so what do we do? - we make a difference where we are](#)

There is a Palestinian village called Umm al Kheir

The first time I went there

we sat in the community centre.

It was a simple tent - the previous centre had been demolished by the IDF
we were welcomed with coffee

'When we hear the drones we know there will be a demolition to come'.
a house had been demolished recently

Adjoining the land of Umm al Kheir is the settlement of Carmel, green lawns and all

Carmel was built on the Palestinians land in 1980, and is expanding.

Now all but surrounding Umm al Kheir, their chicken shed get water supply and electricity, The Palestinians are not on these supplies, being denied permits for development [and as is routine in the West Bank. denied the right to collect rain water](#)

[Photo in 2016: Carmel above, Umm al Kheir below.](#)



Last week the village leader was killed

Awdah Al-Hathaleen

There is a great organisation called ICAHD and their [report](#) of last week is as follows:

armed Israeli settlers attacked the village of Umm al-Khair in Masafer Yatta in the south of the West Bank earlier today, killing Awdah in cold blood. The incident took place during a violent settler attack in which the settlers used a bulldozer to raze infrastructure in privately owned land at the edge of the village. When Awdah and other residents came out to try and prevent the destruction, he was shot twice in the chest. His brother, Ahmad, was critically injured when the bulldozer driver lifted the blade while advancing forward, hitting him in the head.

Following the incident, Israeli military forces went on to invade the village, arresting at least seven Palestinians and two foreign nationals.

He leaves a wife Hanady and three young children, eldest is 5.

The settlers can act with impunity, not even called to account under Israeli law

Settlers are subject to Israeli law, and Palestinians in the West Bank to military law – hence for years this has been an apartheid system (including in Israel – see e.g. [BTSelem report](#) among many others)

I also heard from the village in a webinar last Saturday that the settler accused of the shooting was detained by Israeli police for a few hours and then released free to wander by the mourning tent next to Awdah's relatives. I heard a comment - had he shot an Israeli's dog he would have been held longer.

A villager in that webinar said of Awdah

“His was a non-violent struggle for land, peace, liberation and just normal life in which he was engaged for so many years --even though he was only 31.

If i talk about him for generations i will not say all that should be said about him
His was a peaceful beautiful soul”

Summary... we see the

killing with impunity

detention without trial including of children

people living still in refugee camps, since 1948

Palestinian refugees in other lands

land being taken

New building being disallowed

the settlements

the barrier

forced economic de-development

Control of movement

The trajectory is towards Palestinians having a few townships with no connection to each other or to Gaza.

The path of nonviolent resistance really has been trod for many years by the Palestinians
The countries with power, like our own, are obstacles to its success, in part because nonviolent resistance is ignored by the media - [even the Great March of Return, when so many offering no threat were shot by Israeli snipers, was reported badly here and elicited no action for justice.](#)

If we do not acknowledge and stand in solidarity with the non-violent resistance then it is unsurprising if violent resistance happens - which is **not** a justification but an observation. ([International law should determine what is justified or not.](#))

We can and should join in that non violent resistance from here.

We can call on our politicians to hold Israel to account.

The ICC and ICJ rulings disappeared into the ether to join the UN resolutions such as calling for the right of return of all Palestinian refugees.

The path to peace is through justice.

The path to justice, that is to right relationships,

is through equality and security for all,
under international and humanitarian law.

Some links

We are begged to respond to call after call from Palestinian Christians for us to take a stand for justice in their land. Among these calls:

- <https://www.sjesjesuits.global/2025/06/08/a-jerusalem-voice-for-justice-an-ecumenical-witness-for-equality-and-a-just-peace-in-palestine-israel-2/>
- <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/resources/statements/a-call-for-repentance-an-open-letter-from-palestinian-christians-to-western-church-leaders-and-theologians>
- <https://cryforhope.org/>
- <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/>

BBC has reported from Umm al Kheir: BBC 1 TV news 10pm 10 August and Radio 4 Today, 11 Aug

- i Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh Caritas Justice and Peace Commission lay member

A working group has gathered these resources: <https://linktr.ee/cjp4ip>

Iona Community – updated position on Israel/Palestine: <https://iona.org.uk/updating-our-position-on-Israel-palestine/>

Edinburgh Action for Palestine – see Facebook

- ii Defense for Children International – Palestine <https://www.dci-palestine.org/>