

# The continuing work in Israel and the oPt



"When you first hear the noise, the sound of the rocket, you feel it is going to drop nearby. At any moment you are expecting a huge explosion that will change your life." (Rana - staff member at CA partner the Women's Affairs Centre, Gaza.)

## Introduction

Christian Aid has been working with the poorest and most vulnerable people in the Middle East since the early 1950s, when we provided humanitarian relief to Palestinian refugees.

Today, as Palestinians continue to experience exile, blockade, relentless spikes in violence and huge increases in land dispossession, we work with Palestinian and Israeli partners to protect human rights and promote resilience for Palestinian communities and civil society.

All our work aims to support the foundations for a just, lasting peace for all.

## Recent events

May 2021 saw a serious escalation in violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). With Israel seeking to displace Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah district of East Jerusalem to pave the way for further Israeli settlements, thousands of Palestinians took to the streets in protest.

These protests led to violent clashes between Palestinians and Israelis, and served as a catalyst for further conflict, with Israel launching airstrikes that, according to the UN Council on human rights, killed 260 people including 66 children over a

two-week period. In Israel, 14 people were also killed by mortar fire from Gaza.

A ceasefire between Israel and Hamas eventually came into effect on 21st May, but the violence had already had devastating humanitarian consequences in Gaza. The Israeli airstrikes destroyed homes, businesses, and water supplies which exacerbated the impact of almost 14 years of the Israeli blockade. These past months have seen the worst violence between Israel and Palestinians since 2014.

## Response of our partners

Once the ceasefire had come into effect, Christian Aid partner the Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) made rapid assessments of what people needed using its community networks and volunteers. Their work provided valuable information to the UN in coordinating the humanitarian response.

Working with communities in the Khan Younis area of Gaza, CFTA are providing mental health and psychosocial support services to children, young people, and women traumatised by the violence. A study in 2020 highlighted that over 50% of children in Gaza were suffering from PTSD, and the attacks in May have further impacted these already fragile lives.

## Water infrastructure

Water infrastructure is vital to the livelihoods of Palestinian farmers, and access to a reliable supply is a constant challenge for local communities. In one of the most vulnerable agricultural areas of Gaza, a solar panelled well serving 150 farmers was severely damaged in the May air strikes.

Ahmed, a Christian Aid consultant working in Gaza, shared these words with us: "This area of Gaza, east of Khan Younis and close to the Israel-controlled Access Restricted Area, is very scarce in water. A functioning well is a lifeline for local farmers and it urgently needed repairing after being damaged by airstrikes in May."

"The well runs on solar power during the day, and a mobile generator is installed to run it at night – being mobile, it can be moved away to safety if needed, and can also be lent to other farming communities when they need it... The farmers tell me that this project will enhance their resilience greatly."

With funding from Christian Aid, our partner The Agricultural Development Association (PARC), has worked to repair the damage, enabling farmers to water their crops again. Important work such as this restores livelihoods and provides greater food security for the communities the well serves.

## The Women's Development Programme

The East Jerusalem YMCA Women's Development Programme (WDP) works to support women to act as producers and providers to the local Palestinian market. The project focusses on land cultivation by women, not only to empower their economic abilities, but also to increase their resilience and prevent land confiscations to expand nearby settlements by the Israeli occupation forces.

Two communities where the WDP is present received olive, fig, and almond trees to help prevent land confiscation. By planting these trees, community members were able to show that the land was being cultivated and therefore not available for confiscation and development. Not only does planting trees like this help families protect their land, but they also provide families with a self-sustaining source of production, and any excess can be sold to provide an income.

In communities identified for the programme, residents were at first hesitant to cooperate with the EJ-YMCA staff due to previous NGO activities. However, as further meetings were



**"The well pumps water for 150 vulnerable farmers, who have now been able to save, recover and retain their crops and livelihoods." Ahmed, Christian Aid consultant**

conducted with residents, they began to engage more with the project coordinators. Another issue faced by the WDP when working to establish Protection Groups is the inclusion of women – a potential challenge to the Palestinian patriarchal society – but over time, staff have been able to work with community members to overcome these barriers and build trust.

## Thank you for your support

As you will have seen over the past few months, the situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory is constantly changing. Christian Aid and its partners continue to adapt to meet the needs of the communities we work with, and the support of Carlisle diocese through the Bishop's Harvest Appeal is vital in enabling this important work.

Thank you for all your generous donations.

## Contact us

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