

Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee



WATCHING BRIEF 23-5: AUSTRALIA AND PALESTINE

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government, we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

July 2023

This Brief deals with the changes that have occurred since the May 2022 federal election as they affect relations with Palestine and Israel. It also deals with recent violent clashes in the West Bank and Gaza which have highlighted the deterioration of the status of the Palestinian people in their own land. For more extensive background notes, see our Watching Brief in December 2020 (website www.quakersaustralia.info/concerns/peace).

Australia's Policy

Over many years Australia has adopted the principle of a two-state solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict, but in recent years the Coalition Government has taken a much firmer pro-Israel position, refusing to condemn moves to expand settlements or to oppose the rejection of Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. The Labor Party took a strong pro-Palestine position in its official policy platform, and after its success at the 2022 federal election moved to implement some changes. As a result, the official approach has become the following:

- To acknowledge at the United Nations that the Israeli policy of settlements is illegal under international law.
- To recognise Palestine as a state, and Palestinian rights to self-determination.
- To increase aid by restoring contributions to UNRWA to \$20m a year and allocating an extra \$2.9m bilateral funding to Palestine.
- To support the International Criminal Court's right to investigate crimes in Palestine, and encourage the International Court of Justice to make a ruling on the illegality of Israel's Occupation.
- To reverse the Coalition's decision that Jerusalem is the exclusive 'property' of Israel.

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The Australian Greens have adopted a new policy *Justice and Human Rights in Palestine & Israel*. It reflects language now common among human rights groups, moving from the endless calls for Palestinians to 'negotiate' with their oppressors, towards a call to affirm Palestinian rights to self-determination and basic human rights, Australian recognition of Palestine, and ending military and security trade.

Tragedies in Jenin and Gaza

Meanwhile, Israel continues to exercise complete control of the occupied territories and to inflict frequent military destruction upon Palestinians especially in Gaza and more recently Jenin. In attempts to eliminate 'terrorism', Israel's government uses extreme force against civilians. At the same time, it applies greater repression of any dissent among the Jewish and other communities. It is also determined to weaken the power of the courts to respond to such measures. Here are some points made in an article published about the raids into Jenin on the site *Pearls & Irritations* (9 July 2023) by Reb Halabi:

The latest incursion and horror committed by the IDF and Israeli government is beyond the comprehension of most civilised people of this world. People such as Ben-Givv are itching to have repeat situations like in Jenin so they can rain down their hatred upon the Palestinians. Dangerous people like Ben-Givv give Israelis carte blanche to move in and take, take, take. Take lives, take land and take peoples futures, and in the process try to take away our sense of humanity.

When a fully armed military unit bomb, air strike, smoke out and invade a refugee camp, do they really care who they are shooting at? But these are human beings, women and children, who have been terrorised for seven decades as they struggle to defend themselves against one of the most brutal armies. It's hard to imagine how the authorities of the IDF keep a straight face when saying they "did not own brutal rules. Rules that Human Rights Watch and the UN don't agree with.

Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN)

APAN is a national coalition harnessing the passion of Australians for Palestinian human rights, justice and equality. APAN was formed in May 2011 to provide a national voice for the many thousands of Australians who are concerned about Israel's continuing human rights abuses against Palestinians, and the continuing effects of dispossession and displacement.

APAN members are diverse and include grassroots human rights groups; Jewish and Palestinian groups; aid and development agencies; and unions. Individual members have many different backgrounds including religious leaders; academics; lawyers; former politicians, diplomats and public servants; and many others. APAN is involved in a range of activities and campaigns that seek to influence Australia's public policy in regard to Palestine and Israel, in line with UN resolutions, human rights and international law.

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Palestine Representative in Australia

The Embassy of the State of Palestine is headed by Izzat Salah Abdulhadi, who offers the following comments about his role, which also covers New Zealand and the Pacific:

Australia, New Zealand and Palestine have a relationship that dates back to the liberation of Palestine by Australian and New Zealand soldiers during World War One. It is a relationship founded on important and enduring political, economic and cultural ties

A Palestinian state is integral to the realization of the Palestinian peoples' internationally enshrined right to self-determination, and is crucial for the implementation of a two-state solution as the internationally agreed solution for a just and durable peace, for Palestine, Israel and the region.

www.palestine-australia.com

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

The Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) strategy was initiated in 2005 by 170 Palestinian civil society organisations calling for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel's government. This strategy will continue until such time as the Israeli government abides by international law and Palestinians are given the rights and freedoms they are entitled to. It is based on the successful South African anti-apartheid boycott movement of the 1970s and 80s.

BDS is now a vibrant, global movement supported by unions, academic associations, church and grassroots organisations throughout the world.

www.bdsaustralia.net.au

One of the campaigns of BDS has been focused on Elbit Systems – Israel's largest privately-owned arms and security company which produces 85% of the drones and land-based equipment used by the Israeli military – including in Gaza and the West Bank. It sells white phosphorus, cluster bombs and flechette projectiles, all of which are questionable internationally. In Australia it has been involved (especially since 2008) in the Victorian and Federal government contracts for arms deals, research and training for the Defence and police forces. The BDS campaign is supported by the Arms Trade Treaty (2013) which Australia has signed, and Palestinians have called on all states party to that treaty to oppose Elbit's role in military contracts including in Australia. Australia's willingness to conduct business as usual undermines our integrity and weakens the Palestinians struggle for rightful recognition and peace in the region.

The basic details of Elbit Systems of Australia Pty Ltd (ELSA) are:

- Total Equity US \$2.55bn
- Founded in Israel 1979
- Headquarters in Canberra with sites in Port Melbourne Vic & Murray Qld. Training staff located in Commonwealth facilities in Townsville and Canungra (Qld) Duntroon (ACT) Puckapunyal and Wondonga (Vic)
- Some 80 Elbit employees are former Australian military veterans

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- Australia recently awarded Elbit with the Small Uncrewed Aerial Systems (SUAS) contract
- Elbit systems has a two year contract with RMIT to manufacture drones. These are ostensibly to be used for peaceful purposes but they are a particularly egregious weapons manufacturer which "tests" its weapons on Palestinians.
- They manufacture cluster bombs and phosphorous bombs.
- Their technology is used to support the Israeli separation wall.

Quaker Response

The most recent alert from the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) to Quakers concluded:

This year has been deadly for Palestinians. Since the start of the year, at least 145 Palestinians—including at least 30 children—have been killed by the Israeli military. Settler violence is also on the rise. In the first six months of this year, there were over 450 attacks on Palestinians by settlers. Several of these attacks involved hundreds of settlers and have been described by the Israeli military and media as “pogroms.” Meanwhile, thousands of Palestinians are being forcibly displaced as Israel demolishes their homes, schools, and infrastructure in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Pressure must be placed on Israel to stop violating human rights and international law.

Quakers in Britain have a long history of working for peace in Palestine and Israel. As part of this commitment, Quakers manage the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), on behalf of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and other partner agencies. In 2011, Quakers in Britain agreed a national position to boycott products from the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. In 2014, Britain's Yearly Meeting Gathering, issued a statement, calling on the UK government to recognise the state of Palestine on the same basis as it recognises the state of Israel. In November 2018, Britain Yearly Meeting trustees announced that the church will not invest any of its centrally-held funds in companies profiting from the occupation of Palestine.

Quakers Australia belong to APAN and have encouraged its initiatives to raise awareness and lobby MPs and Senators. At the Yearly Meeting held 1-9 July 2023, Friends agreed to send a letter to the Federal Government (https://www.quakersaustralia.info/sites/aym-members/files/pages/files/Palestine%20Support_PM.pdf) in support of its change of policies. At the same time, a concern was raised about Elbit's operations and Friends were encouraged to make known their objections to its role in Australia.

The details in this Brief should give background to enable Friends to follow up the concern with letters and contacts with MPs and Senators. APAN has a list of those parliamentarians who supported its work in 2022 – see www.apan.org.au/un_day_2022/

Canberra July 2023

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