

An open letter to Cardinal Vincent Nichols

Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Your Eminence,

Those at the AGM of the National Justice and Peace Network, meeting on Saturday, were deeply shocked to hear of the attack by Israeli Police on Palestinians at prayer in the Al Aqsa Mosque on Friday evening. Palestinian worshippers have been denied access to the Al Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan and this, along with the police and military incursions into this holy place, the use of stun grenades, rubber coated steel bullets and water cannons on those at worship, all contravene international law.

All of this is made worse by that fact that this is one of the most important times of the Muslim Year. Saturday's attacks took place at Laylat-al-Qadr, the most holy day in the Muslim month of Ramadan, a time when Palestinians from all over the West Bank would attempt to pray in their most Holy Place. It followed the aggressive violence of armed Israeli settlers invading the communal Iftar meal of families in Sheikh Jarrah, upturning their tables, invading their homes and attacking women, men and children.

This excessive violence has continued since then and several Palestinian children are among the hundreds wounded. The violence has been described by some of the worst seen in Jerusalem for many years.

Palestinians are suffering the daily loss of their fundamental human rights, are constantly under threat of forced removal from their homes as in the Sheikh Jarrah district of occupied East Jerusalem.

Many news outlets are describing these incidents as 'clashes' and so inferring that these are incidents between equally armed sides. This is, of course, not the case. Unarmed worshippers were attacked by heavily armed police and at other times by even more heavily armed military.

**We urge you and the Bishops of England and Wales to answer the call of the Heads of Churches in Palestine who say:**

**'We call upon the International Community, the Churches and all people of goodwill to intervene in order to put an end to these provocative actions, and to continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. We join in prayer with the intention of the Holy Father Pope Francis that "the multi-religious and multi-cultural identity of the Holy City might be respected and that fraternity might prevail."**

**We further ask you to:**

- Tell our Sisters and Brothers in Palestine, and all those who are working for peace in Palestine and Israel, that we stand in solidarity and prayer with them in this on-going Nakba;
- Call for a day of prayer, in England and Wales, on Saturday 15th May for peace and justice in Palestine, and in particular in Jerusalem, as Palestinians recall the Nakba (the Day of Catastrophe);
- Publicly denounce the violent attacks on worshippers that have taken place in Sheikh Jarrah, the Al Aqsa Mosque and Haram al Sharif;
- Call on the Israeli Government, through the Israeli Embassy in London: to halt **all** forced evictions in Sheikh Jarrah, which if they proceed, will violate Israel's obligations under international law; and to end the violence against worshippers and enable full access to all places of worship in keeping with international law.

Yours in solidarity,

Paul Southgate (Chair, National Justice & Peace Network)

Ann Farr (Chair, Pax Christi)