

World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel 2014: 'I was in prison'

Welcome and introduction to theme

'I was in prison and you visited me': these words from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, are our call to worship. In the security of our local communities and familiar places of worship, in this gathering, we may well question God, 'When did we see you ill or in prison and come to visit you?' During the next hour we will be hearing testimonies of people (both Israeli and Palestinian) who have been imprisoned under/as an outcome of the Israeli Occupation of the Palestinian territories. We will be confronted by statistics of children in detention, and questions about the legality of this situation. We will also reflect on how the Occupation, and the failure by politicians, including our own, to persevere with the Peace Process, means that many - Israelis and Palestinians - are imprisoned by history, by prejudice in some cases, poverty in others, and by anger and fear.

We are called, in the words of a Palestinian Christian, to '*Pray not for the Jew or Muslim or Christian, Israeli or Palestinian or Arab; pray rather for ourselves, that we might not separate them in our minds but instead join them in our prayers.*' In this way we will visit them, in this prison which we have helped to make. And, being present to them, we will meet God.

Prayer of approach:

God of all glory
You call your people to seek justice
to love mercy,
and to humbly walk with you.
Grant that we inspired by your spirit
may be for ever unsettled
until all your people in every land
may live in peace,
know justice freedom and love day by day,
through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Action: *A candle surrounded by barbed wire, as used by Amnesty, is carried in silence to a central point, placed there and lit.*

Hymn: Christ be our Light (*'Longing for light'*) CH4 543, StF 706)

or

Hymn: When I needed a neighbour (CH4 544, StF 256, AHO&N 819) with extra verse:

'When they put me in prison were you there, were you there....'

Statement: Our Solidarity

For Palestinian Prisoners Day on 17 April, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, wrote:

The World Council of Churches resolutely confirms our solidarity with the nearly 5000 Palestinian men, women and children languishing in Israeli prisons. As people of faith, we are called to pray for, visit and tend to the needs of all prisoners, no matter the reason for their detention. For Israel and Palestine, prisoners have taken on even greater significance than in the past.

We were disappointed when the Government of Israel cancelled the scheduled release of prisoners who were in Israeli jails even before the Oslo Agreement of 1993. In addition to disrupting an already fragile negotiations process, this move deepened heartache for many families, relatives, friends and, indeed, the entire Palestinian people.

Since 1967, close to 750,000 Palestinians have faced detention in Israeli jails. Many are held under arbitrary administrative detention for lengthy periods with no access to quick and fair trial. We observe that Israeli legal systems for Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank are separate and unequal. We are concerned by reports of torture and the use of arrest as a political weapon. We are especially concerned about the continuing practice of detaining children.

Hymn or solo: God Weeps (StF 700, CH4 168)

or

Hymn: Investing in Peace (see text in notes)

Reading stories and statements and responding

Between readings there is a sung response *

CHANT: Kyrie eleison (Christ have mercy)

READER 1: Children in detention

This account comes from an article in the Guardian by Harriet Sherwood based on interviews and sworn affidavits given by Palestinian minors to Defence for Children International.

The room is barely wider than the thin, dirty mattress that covers the floor. Behind a low concrete wall is a squat toilet, the stench from which has no escape in the windowless room. The rough concrete walls deter idle leaning; the constant overhead light inhibits sleep. The delivery of food through a low slit in the door is the only way of marking time, dividing day from night.

This is Cell 36, deep within Al Jalame prison in northern Israel. It is one of a handful of cells where Palestinian children are locked in solitary confinement for days or even weeks. One 16-year-old claimed that he had been kept in Cell 36 for 65 days.

The only escape is to the interrogation room where children are shackled, by hands and feet, to a chair while being questioned, sometimes for hours.

Most are accused of throwing stones at soldiers or settlers; some, of flinging molotov cocktails; a few, of more serious offences such as links to militant organisations or using weapons. They are also pumped for information about the activities and sympathies of their classmates, relatives and neighbours.

At the beginning, nearly all deny the accusations. Most say they are threatened; some report physical violence. Verbal abuse - 'You're a dog, a son of a whore' - is common. Many are exhausted from sleep deprivation. Day after day they are fettered to the chair, then returned to solitary confinement. In the end, many sign confessions that they later say were coerced... Other cells in Al Jalame and Petah Tikva prisons are also used for solitary confinement, but Cell 36 is the one cited most often in these testimonies.

Information from Addameer and Defence for Children International.

Approximately 700 Palestinian children under the age of 18 from the occupied West Bank are prosecuted every year through Israeli military courts after being arrested, interrogated and detained by the Israeli army. At the end of March, 2014 202 Palestinian children were imprisoned and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system. Documentation in May this year showed rising numbers of Palestinian children are being subjected to solitary confinement for interrogation purposes in Israeli detention.

CHANT: Kyrie eleison (Christ have mercy)

READER 2: The United Nations speaks on behalf of children

UN Article 37 states that parties shall ensure that:

- (a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offences committed by persons below eighteen years of age;
- (b) No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;
- (c) Every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances;
- (d) Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.

CHANT: Kyrie eleison (Christ have mercy)

READER 3: What is administrative detention?

Administrative detention is a procedure under which detainees are held without charge or trial. No charges are filed, and there is no intention of bringing the detainee to trial. In accordance with the detention order, a detainee is given a specific term of detention. On or before the expiry of the term, the detention order is frequently renewed. This process can be continued indefinitely.

Administrative detention has been commonly used by repressive regimes to circumvent the legal process and to hinder access by political dissidents to the protection that they should be entitled to under the law. Places where it has been used to a particular extent include Northern Ireland, South Africa (under apartheid), the United States, and Israel.

The military prosecutor is usually the only source of information about the evidence in administrative detention cases; however, the defence lawyer cannot cross-examine the prosecutor as a witness. Instead, the prosecutor answers all of the defence lawyer's questions without being sworn in and has the right not to answer questions. A typical examination during a hearing to extend an administrative detention order goes as follows:

(Readers 1 and 2)

Q. Is any of the evidence open?

A. No.

Q. What is my client accused of?

A. Activities to help terrorism.

Q. How did he help terrorism?

A. He's in an organization.

Q. Which organization?

A. That is part of the secret evidence.

Q. Who else is in the organization with him?

A. That is part of the secret evidence.

(From a report by Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association).

Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association claims that the practice of administrative detention in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory contravenes fundamental human rights. Israel uses administrative detention in a highly arbitrary manner without putting even the most basic safeguards in place, leading to other, grave human rights violations, such as inhuman and degrading treatment and torture.

Therefore Addameer states that: All administrative detainees held on account of their political views or their activities carried out in resistance to the occupation should be released promptly and unconditionally. Fair trial standards must be respected for all political detainees, including those accused of committing acts that are considered crimes according to international law. Addameer further demands that the occupying power adhere to international law and that restrictions on the use of administrative detention be imposed. The judicial review of administrative detention orders must meet the minimum international standards for due process. The authorities must provide

detainees with prompt and detailed information as to the reason for their detention, and with a meaningful opportunity to defend themselves.

CHANT: Kyrie eleison (Christ have mercy)

READER 1: One hunger striker among many

(This information, shared by Jewish Voice for Peace, should be updated if possible).

Abdul Razeq Farraj was arrested on 25 February at around 2 am at his home in Ramallah. Without having been questioned, he was handed a six-month administrative detention order the next day, issued by a military commander. A military judge confirmed the order on 4 March on the basis of 'secret information' that neither Abdul Razeq Farraj nor his lawyers were allowed to see. Abdul Razeq Farraj's appeal against his administrative detention was submitted to a military court on 20 May and was rejected six days later. His lawyer petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court on 29 May and was still awaiting a decision.

On 30 April Abdul Razeq Farraj joined a hunger strike begun six days earlier by more than 125 detainees, demanding that Israel stop the use of administrative detention. In protest of Israel's long-standing policy of detaining Palestinians without charge or trial, prisoners have begun one of the largest hunger strikes of all time.

According to his lawyers (from the human rights organization Addameer) when he joined the strike, the Israel Prison Service moved Abdul Razeq Farraj to solitary confinement and denied him salt to add to his water, apparently as punishment.

His wife, Lamees, told Amnesty International that she was only been allowed to visit him once, in April, before he began his hunger strike, and his family have since been prevented from visiting him. She said that Abdul Razeq was prevented from seeing a lawyer and independent doctors, making it very hard for the family to get information about his whereabouts and the state of his health.

CHANT: Kyrie eleison (Christ have mercy)

READER 2: Two conscientious objectors

There is a growing movement of *refuseniks*, young Israelis who refuse military service - for which they are liable to imprisonment.

Uriel Ferera from Be'er Sheva, a member an ultra-Orthodox family, was 18 years old when he reported to Tel Hashomer military induction base, accompanied by a demonstration of support for his refusal to serve in the military. He was one of the first to sign the latest *refusenik* letter. Uriel declared his refusal to serve for reasons of conscience due to his opposition to the occupation of the Palestinian people and discrimination against Palestinians inside Israel.

Uriel has excelled in both secular and religious studies. From childhood, he accompanied his photographer mother, Ruty, to rallies for social justice in the Negev (one of Israel's

poorest areas) as well as for protests on behalf of the Negev Bedouin, helping his mother document injustice and taking part in local actions.

He is now 19, and on 8 June this year he was tried and sentenced that very same day to 20 days in military prison no. 6 near Atlit. This is Uriel's third sentence. Due to his refusal to wear the prison uniform, he was punished and put in solitary confinement. During the last days of his first **prison** term, he was denied phone calls including calls to his lawyer from New Profile, and also denied the right to receive letters of support.

The imprisonment of conscientious objectors such as Ferera is a violation of international law, of basic human rights and of morality. The repeated imprisonment of conscientious objectors is an especially grave offence, as it means sentencing a person more than once for the same offence, and has been judged by a UN working group to constitute a clear case of Arbitrary Detention.

Uriel said: 'I can do my part and have a meaningful national service, in education or community work. I appealed to the IDF committee that deals with conscientious objectors and explained my situation, but they told me that they are determined to send me to jail...That's what I don't understand. Instead of allowing me to do national service, doing my part for the country, I'm going to jail, wasting taxpayer money and doing nothing. I'm going to be jailed for an undetermined period of time - not because I committed a crime, but because of my peaceful convictions.'

CHANT: Kyrie eleison (Christ have mercy)

READER 3:

(This information was shared by the Israeli organisation New Profile)

Omar Saad, at the age of 18, was first sentenced to imprisonment for his refusal to join the Israeli Army. Omar is a member of the Palestinian Arab Druze community. He comes from Mghar, a village in the Galilee. He has now been sentenced to prison for the seventh time.

On Sunday 13 April this year he arrived at the Induction Base in Tal Hashomer where he declared his refusal to serve in the Israeli Army. Omar was sentenced to 40 days of imprisonment, in the military prison No 4.

Civilian lawyers, including lawyers from New Profile, have been banned from visiting Omar and other objectors, during his incarcerations in military prisons. The army claims that civilian lawyers are not certified to enter military prisons. After media exposure, the army authorities set aside the order, and claimed it to be a 'misunderstanding'.

The Palestinian Arab Druze community, in contrast to Arab society in large, was the target of a decision by Prime Minister Ben Gurion in 1956 that forced them to serve in the Israeli army. In his refusal declaration in 2012, Omar Saad wrote:

'I refuse that because I am pacifist, and I hate any kind of violence, and I believe that the army... is the top of physical and psychological violence...I remembered thousands of hard images, and I could not imagine myself wearing the military uniform and

participating in suppressing my Palestinian people, and fighting my Arab brothers. I reject enlisting to the Israeli army or to any other army, because of national and moral reasons. I hate oppression, and I reject occupation.'

After being sentenced for the seventh time, this April, Omar stated:
'I declare out loud today: I Omar Zaher Alden Saad will not serve in the Israeli military army and I demand respect for my faith and I yearn for my freedom. Those who sent me to prison today and for 40 days, before you sit with your family to celebrate (Easter) Passover and to tell the (Easter) Passover story to your children how they are free now and not slaves any more, look in the mirror, you will see you are still a slave that carry out orders.'

CHANT: Kyrie eleison (Christ have mercy)

Gospel reading: Luke 4: 14-21

Time for Reflection

The Gospel reading is followed *either* by a period of silence, interspersed with individual Biblical verses, read aloud by different voices (using a microphone) or printed out and distributed randomly at the start of the service for individual quiet reflection (*Luke 4:18, Matt 5:9, Matt 25:35b-36, Luke 2:14, Romans 12:18, 14:19, 2 Corinthians 13:11b, Hebrews 12:14, John 8 32, Leviticus 26: 6, Numbers 6: 26, Proverbs 21:3, Job 8:3, Psalm 68:5-6a, Psalm 82:3, 122:6-8, Isaiah 9:7, Micah 6:8*)

Or by the playing of an appropriate recorded song, with accompanying images (see notes).

Lord's Prayer

Hymn: We lay our broken world (CH4 721, StF 718)

or

Hymn: Brother, sister let me serve you (CH4 694, StF 611, R&S 474, AHO&N 81)

or

Hymn: Show me how to stand for Justice (StF 713, AHO&N 657)

Prayer of intercession

God of justice

we pray for those imprisoned unjustly in Israel/Palestine:

interned without trial,

arrested for peaceful protests,

sentenced under unequal laws,

imprisoned for following conscience, for speaking truth to power,

And we pray for all to see the things that make for peace,
to respond to your Kairos, when the prisoners will become free.

God of compassion

we pray for those suffering imprisonment in Israel/Palestine:
for children, in a place where they are afraid, abused and harmed for life;
for those in long solitary confinement; those held hostage for exchange;
for prisoners' families, cut off from contact with those they love;
for conscientious objectors;
for young men and women enforcing a system
who are also prisoners - of ideology and fear.
And we pray that love will prevail over fear
and that the prisoners will become free.

(ALL)

God of justice and compassion

**while history and high walls, prejudice and fear,
barbed wire and locked doors,
divide those who live in the land that we call holy,
we pray that we may not divide them in our hearts,
for we are all your children.**

The time is near when the prisoners will become free:

we pray in hope - Amen

Hymn: For the healing of the nations (StF 696, CH4 706, R&S 620, AHO&N 198)

or

Hymn: Beauty for brokenness (StF 693, CH4 259, AHO&N 67)

Blessing

May the blessing of the God of life
whose gift of freedom is for all people;
the blessing of the shackled Christ
in whose compassionate embrace each captive is held;

the blessing of the restless Spirit
who opens closed minds and locked doors,
create in us a longing to break oppressive chains
until all live and thrive in the liberty of the children of God. Amen.

NOTES

1. Choice of these hymns or others is open to those organising the service locally. Those suggested here can be found in the **Church Hymnary 4 (CH4)**, **Singing the Faith (StF)**, **Rejoice and Sing (R&S)**, **Anglican Hymns Old & New 2008 Kevin Mayhew (AHO&N)**

2. Hymn: Investing in peace

Lord Jesus, you wept for Jerusalem—
city that failed to live up to its name
you longed to hold its children in your arms
If only they had known what leads to peace.

And still the walls of hate and fear divide
suspicion and mistrust on either side
so that both hope and justice are denied.
Lord, give us courage to invest in peace.

In love you chose to take the uphill way
confronting bitter hate and enmity
to draw together those once far away
till through your cross you paid the price of peace.

When we are tempted by the careless way
of hasty prejudice and bigotry,
awaken us from all complacency
and give us courage to invest in peace.

(Tune Chilton Foliat) Iain D. Cunningham Copyright © 2011

3. Chant: **Kyrie eleison, Christ have mercy** (eg CH4 776, 777 or 648)

4. Songs by Garth Hewett, Martin John Nicholls or Penny Stone and Karen Chalk are all available on CDs.

5. 'I remember' is by Tim Judson (*file of music and pictures supplied by John Howard*).

6. Prayer of approach: John Howard, Prayer of intercession: Jan Sutch Pickard, Blessing: Warren Bardsley.

Liturgy compiled by Jan Sutch Pickard, with John Howard and Warren Bardsley