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### Palestine-Israel

Divided land. Border and settlement disputes. Refugees. A divided city. These are all issues that make up the giant conflict in Palestine-Israel. Israel is unwilling to surrender portions of its land to Palestine. Palestine refugees are under occupation and surveillance by the Israelis and feel that their voices are not being heard. The United States is in the middle, attempting peace efforts and supporting the countries with financial and economic aid. Palestine and Israel have had conflicts for over a century; therefore, it is time that both countries cooperate and compromise to finally move towards a just agreement and live together in peace.

The initial movement that started the long struggle between Palestine and Israel occurred over a century ago. In the late 1800s, Zionism became a growing movement among Jewish people. The goal of the Zionists was to form a Jewish state. They picked Palestine as their destination, mainly because Jerusalem was considered a holy Jewish city. The Jews also claimed that the land was their “promised land” that they received in 1250 BC until they were driven out by the Romans in 70 AD. The Palestinians, however, objected to the formation of a Jewish state in their homeland and claimed that, after centuries of colonization, the land belonged to them. In 1947 the United Nations intervened and developed a Partition Plan that would split Palestine into two territories: an Israeli territory and a Palestinian territory, and Jerusalem would be an international city. In 1948, however, the Jews declared their part of Palestine a Jewish state and renamed it Israel. The day after Israel was declared a Jewish state, five surrounding Arab countries declared war on Israel (BBC News). Israel had a strong military, however, and defeated the Arab armies. As a result, Israel expanded its state and forced Palestinians out of their homes. In 1967, during the Six Day War, Israel took over West Bank and the Gaza Strip,

which belonged to the Palestinians (A Synopsis of the Israel/Palestine Conflict). Because the acquisition of a territory by war was prohibited by the United Nations Security Council, Israel occupied those areas without owning the land (BBC News). In 1973, Egypt and Syria invaded and attacked Israel on Yom Kippur, a Jewish holiday. It became known as the Yom Kippur War. The Arab armies tried to take back the Golan Heights and advanced in Sinai. In the end, however, Israel pushed the Arabs back (BBC News). In 1987, Palestinians formed a riot and revolted; this was called the Intifada. In 1993, the Oslo Peace Accord was held in which the Palestinians consented to a Jewish state in exchange for the withdrawal of the Israelis from the occupation in West Bank and the Gaza Strip (BBC News). The next year, Israeli troops withdrew from Gaza. However, these problems still remain to this day.

Three of the most important ongoing conflicts are the borders, the settlements, and the city of Jerusalem. Palestine wants the eastern half of Jerusalem, but Israel refuses to give up part of the city, claiming that “Jerusalem, complete and united, is the capital of Israel” (BBC). As for the Israel and Palestine borders, Israel agrees that there should be a Palestinian state. It gave the Gaza Strip back in 2005 and accepts that it will have to withdraw from parts of the West Bank. Israel wants to keep Jerusalem and the main settlements in West Bank part of the Israeli territory, however. Palestine wants their land to be free of Israeli settlements as it is in Gaza; if that is not possible, Palestine wants a land swap instead. Palestinian refugees want to return to their homes that were taken away from them in the previous wars. Israel, however, does not believe it owes refugees the “right of return” and is afraid that the Palestinians will unite and attempt to destroy the Jewish state (BBC).

Today, the West Bank and Gaza Strip are under tight Israeli security. Although Israel withdrew its troops from Gaza in 2005, it still controls all air, sea, and land access (Schlabach).

The resources and goods entering Gaza have been limited, so it is difficult for the people of Gaza to develop an import or export economy (Schlabach). Israel also refuses to allow the people to leave Gaza unless it is a medical emergency. Checkpoints and roadblocks in West Bank make traveling throughout the area complicated, and Israel put up a “security wall” through the country, cutting into Palestinian territory (Schlabach). Peace efforts are slow going. In March of 2010, Israel made plans to settle 1600 new housing units in Eastern Jerusalem (Schlabach).

Initially, the United States supported Israel both financially and militarily and continues to do so today. Israel receives approximately \$3 billion in military aid, and a quarter of the money Israel receives from Foreign Military Financing is used for Israeli defensive costs (Sharp). Eventually, the United States used its influence to motivate a peaceful resolution by creating a Palestinian state as well. However, they have made little progress and still strongly support Israel. “A steady stream of resolutions in support of Israel are introduced in Congress, frequently passing with overwhelming support” (Schlabach). The average amount that the Palestinians receive from the U.S. government since 2004 averages to \$388 million a year (Sharp). According to Jeremy Sharp, a specialist in Middle Eastern affairs, “Most U.S. assistance to the Palestinians is provided through USAID’s West Bank and Gaza program. USAID allocates funds for projects in sectors such as humanitarian assistance, economic development, democratic reform, improving water access and other infrastructure, health care, education, and vocational training” (Sharp). The Obama Administration declared in June 2010 that an extra \$400 million would be given to the Palestinian economic aid in West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

To create a just and peaceful solution to Palestine-Israel, both countries need to cooperate and compromise. In 2004, the Geneva Accords were brought up and discussed as a peace proposal. They stated that an Israeli and a Palestinian state would each be formed (PASSIA).

Both Israel and Palestine should be able to have official states. Prior to the entire conflict, the Jews did not have a state, and therefore they deserve their own Jewish state. However, the Palestinians who lived in Israel before the Zionists took over do not deserve to have been kicked out of their homes, so they also deserve their homeland as a state. The borders for the Palestinian state should go back to the land the Palestinians owned before the war in 1967 (PASSIA). Palestinians living in the Palestinian state would not be under any Israeli control (PASSIA); this would mean the Israelis would not occupy Palestine and control the flow of goods in and out of the country. The Palestinians would not attack Israel in an attempt to make it a Palestinian nation because it would already have its own nation. Jerusalem would be an international city and the capital of both states (PASSIA), since it has religious and political meaning to both countries. With this agreement, both countries would be compromising to make peace; no one country would receive the better end of the deal. Israel would have to sacrifice some of the land that it controls, and Palestine would not be able to receive everything it wanted but would have to accept the land that was offered (PASSIA). The Geneva Accords efforts should be continued to resolve the issues in a just and peaceful way.

In the meantime, Christians around the world should work together to show love and compassion to the Palestinian refugees who are in need. MCC has provided humanitarian relief for refugees in the Gaza Strip after the economic siege (Gaza). MCC also provides various food, water, and education projects (Israel-Palestine). However, we as Christians should not only provide aid, but speak out for peace. Christians can write to the President and urge for a peaceful and just resolution. “As fellow Christians, we are called to offer comfort to those who are oppressed. But even more than comfort and aid, we must use our voices to call for justice” (Gaza).

The Palestine-Israel conflict has been raging for over a century. There has been an imbalance of power, and both countries claim the land as their own and fail to listen to each other. The United States initially supported Israel but has been working towards a peaceful resolution for both Israel and Palestine. However, the government still strongly supports Israel financially and militarily. The United States government needs to view and support both countries equally and work towards a just agreement that will compromise and benefit both countries. Both Israel and Palestine need to cooperate in order to peacefully resolve the conflict. As Christians, we can speak out for justice and pray for the nation's leaders to make wise decisions to move towards peace and for both countries to cooperate together.

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