

**From the imprisoned heart**  
**Updates, Reflections and Prayers December 2009**

**INDEX**

**GAZA**

Gaza Facts	1
Gaza: Peace is only possible if it embraces justice	Fr Manuel Musallam 1
Forgotten Gaza - a prayer	Garth Hewitt 2
Update on the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza - December 2009	Suhaila Tarazi 3

**BETHLEHEM**

Reflection	Zoughbi Zoughbi 4
The Light of Bethlehem - a prayer	Garth Hewitt 5

**OTHER WRITINGS**

Jerusalem: A shout of rage	Mazim Qumsiyeh 6
A personal story	Doctor Swee Ang 7
Never Understand	Chris Rose 8
Some prayers remain unanswered	Chris Rose 8

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**Gaza Facts**

From 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009, the Israeli Defense Force subjected the 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to an assault of devastating intensity and scope. Targets included factories, hospitals, UN facilities and medical personnel.

- 1,400 Palestinians were killed, the majority civilians, including over 300 children. Over 5,000 were injured, just under half women and children.
- Damage to vital infrastructure was estimated at \$1.4bn. More than 6,000 homes were destroyed. There has been no major reconstruction, with construction materials banned from entry. Only 5-10% of water from Gaza's aquifer now meets international safety standards.
- Palestinians in the Gaza Strip continue to suffer the blockade. Unemployment runs at 40%, over 70% are living on less that \$2 a day, only 7% of factories operate and only a quarter of the committed UN truckloads of aid supplies get in each week.

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**Peace is only possible if it embraces justice**

words of Father Manuel Musallam about Gaza

Gaza was suffering before the war,  
and Gaza suffers the agony of the aftermath of the war.  
Hundreds of families are weeping bitter tears.  
Their homes have been demolished and razed to the ground,

Hundreds of families have lost everything - furniture and money - all that they had saved with the sweat of their brows.  
Hundreds of wealthy families have lost all their orchards and properties and have become poor and homeless.  
Hundreds of small farmers have lost the money that is strategic to their survival.

Gaza is not a city of a thousand martyrs, but a city of a million and a half martyrs. Those who have died are at rest, but the rest of the people are living daily martyrdom and will do so for many years. Those who were wounded badly and painfully, have been torn apart, and they will live and those who live with them, a daily testimony. They are living the great persecution era lived by the church in its beginnings.

So, let's write history for the future generations as a testimony of faith, hope and love. We are waiting for relief from God.  
How many centres for disabled adults and how many schools do we need to build for children who have been wounded and have become disabled, or are suffering from trauma? Who will care for all these?

How many hearing treatment centres do we need to provide for those who had their hearing affected as a result of the F-16 planes and heavy bombs?  
How many homes for orphans do we need to build?  
What about the conditions of the young widows?

The world must find a solution to the issue of the Palestinian people, who must not be left under siege.  
Borders should be set for the state of Israel, and it must not be allowed to roam on Arab lands.  
The occupation that has lasted for more than 60 years must end. The refugee problem must be resolved with the right of return.  
The issue of Jerusalem must be settled.  
The Apartheid Wall must be demolished.  
The borders must be opened and Palestinians prisoners given their freedom.  
All the settlements must be removed and the Palestinian people must be given the right to self-determination and national rights. Know that if the world gave us our rights and established justice, it will be assured of peace in the Middle East.

Peace is only possible if it embraces Justice. I call you to be the peace of the world like the good shepherd and that you will carry us on your shoulders and restore us to the fold of the good and civilized world.

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### **Forgotten Gaza**

a prayer by Garth Hewitt, director of Amos Trust

Each Christmas we are reminded that there was no room for the holy family. This year, Lord, we remember forgotten Gaza - there's no room for them in our world.

Bombed and attacked last Christmas and New Year with over five and a half thousand injured and over fourteen hundred killed - homes were destroyed, schools, places of worship, and hospitals and even ambulances were targeted.

But this Christmas nothing has improved - they are still forgotten - still imprisoned, still under a medieval type siege, with water taken and facilities destroyed.

Lord we remember forgotten Gaza - a beautiful historic place, denied human rights, with no proper facilities for the injured and disabled.  
Gaza - passed by on the other side by the powerful and by politicians - yet loved and precious to God.

Lord, we remember forgotten Gaza,  
May mercy come, may justice come, may love come, may Christmas come.

You who had no place to lay your head -  
You who knew what it was to be despised and rejected -  
Have mercy on forgotten Gaza and move our hearts this Christmas to make room for Gaza - so we work to bring them the gift of justice and the gift of hope this year.

Amen

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### **Update on the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza - December 2009**

from director of the hospital, Dr Suhaila Tarazi

"The attack on the Gaza Strip in the year 2009 overwhelmed a region already debilitated by the preceding 18-month blockade and embargo. In the health care sector, the conflict brought the increased burdens of additional injured patients, exacerbated chronic illness, endemic psychosocial stress and malnutrition, and worsened poverty. With thousands more homeless people living in an environment corrupted by live military ordnance, residual toxins, and inadequate water and waste management resources, most health care needs are still struggling to be met at the end of 2009. Moreover, siege is still taking place, which has a negative impact on the life of the Gazans. There is an increase of unemployment to 44% with 77% living below \$2 a day. According to the World Food federation " the majority of Gaza people are becoming dependant on food aid".

Due to the Israeli restrictions on the movement of people and goods, there are also shortages of medical supplies, fuel, cooking gas, lack of raw materials, and a tremendous increase in the price of food. Added to that Israel Defense Forces has continued its daily incursions and bombardments to the Palestinians towns and villages, leaving people in fear that new attacks will occur soon.

Despite of the hospital meagre resources the hospital during the past ten months of 2009 was able to:

- Treat more than 35,600 outpatients in the general medicine, surgery and rehabilitation services with an increase of 20 % on 2008
- Provide free basic medical care to seventy poor communities and provide comprehensive medical care to 4,550 deprived women, children and men.
- Continue to provide physiotherapy and rehabilitation services for hundreds of war injured and burnt children
- Treat completely free of charge more than 560 chronically ill poor women
- Distribute food parcels for 600 families
- Run special programmes for 600 malnourished children for four months each.
- Screen 400 women for breast cancer, of which 7% were in need of further investigations.
- Host a new multilateral programme of psychosocial support for women and children, where local professionals have been trained to provide psychosocial support in a number of venues around Gaza. About 6,000 attendants most of them were women who benefited from these sessions.
- Run special training programmes for 25 new graduate and undergraduate personnel to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to have a better chance of gaining work in other health institutions.

In summery, the conflict of early 2009 is not forgotten. Throughout Gaza, the scars remain and the hardships, lack of resources, and restricted movements continue. But with the encouragement and solidarity of Amos and other supporters Al Ahli Hospital endures and continues its much-needed ministry of compassionate care for all who seek its services.

The hospital has started to renovate the maternity and obstetric unit at the hospital, so that we will be able to provide impoverished pregnant women with the best pre and post natal care (including family planning) as well as safe maternal care. So please do support the development of both out and inpatient maternity services.

Once more thank you, hand in hand we will continue build peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land."

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### **Reflection**

by Zoughbi Zoughbi, founder & director of Wi'am - The Palestinian Conflict Resolution Centre in Bethlehem

Peace we give you from Bethlehem where hopes, ambitions, passion, suffering and dreams coexist as an incessant reminder to the world that people of Bethlehem in particular, and Palestine in general, are determined to live and to celebrate life. Our perseverance echoes our assertiveness to enjoy life to the full as we believe life deserves living.

Oh little town of Bethlehem you become smaller and tinier. Herod is still ruling the Holy Land. Kids are tormented, imprisoned and killed. Rachel and hundreds of women still cry and weep. More and more families are leaving their homes in Palestine in order to escape injustice and tyranny.

Jesus is now born with a different reality. The magi are barred from crossing the border because the wall is so high and intimidating. The shepherds are not able to feed their sheep because the pastures have been annexed and the land turned into 'Green Zones'. The angels are singing a sad lament.

Yet in spite of all this, the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness will not put it down. Christ is born not only in the stable, but also in our hearts. The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is a constant reminder to all of us that life should be celebrated despite all odds. No one on this earth should stop us from enjoying life and happiness.

The Holy Family has now found a different route in. The smile of this small child is mightier than all forms oppression, frustration and injustice. Peace and agape are his messages. Life and joy are his wishes. Humbleness and serving are his attitude. Unconditional love and sacrifice is his mission.

As we identify with the Christ child's message let us tell the world and the political leaders all over the world not to tamper or postpone the inevitability of the fact that love will eventually conquer. Mercy and justice will dominate the world as cruelty is doomed to end.

The child will shape the world again with his shining love and the stable will become big enough to include all, the marginalized, the downtrodden, the neglected and the poor.

This is our vision for a new world order. You are always invited to be part of it. When you celebrate Christmas, please think and pray for your brothers and sisters who are in need of you, so we can say: Glory to God in Heaven.

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### **The Light of Bethlehem**

by Garth Hewitt, director of Amos Trust

The lights are going out all over Bethlehem.  
Hope is evaporating in Bethlehem.  
Peace has long disappeared from Bethlehem.  
Bethlehem, you gave the world so much - a humble prince of peace, angels who sang of hope, you gave us a manger, a shepherds' field, and all the joy of Christmas.

Yet now you lie imprisoned, behind walls that separate you from us. Behind huge walls that deny your value, your humanity and your future.  
And the lights will go out all over the world if we forget the way of Bethlehem and the way of the Prince of Peace.

We have forgotten to love our neighbour as ourselves - to do unto others as we would have them do to us. We have forgotten to show mercy and do justice. This year may we determine to bring the light back to Bethlehem by giving, by loving, by not forgetting and by going.

On the hills of Bethlehem the great prophet Amos cried, "Let justice roll down". Jesus of Bethlehem, light of the world, may we work to bring justice and light back to Bethlehem this year.

Amen

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### **Jerusalem: A shout of rage**

some thoughts from Mazim Qumsiyeh

While politicians fret over terms like "slow-down" or "restraint" on illegal settlement activities, yesterday the Israeli authorities demolished more homes and evicted some 30 people in Jerusalem. One home demolished was that of a disabled woman, whose home neighbours and friends had helped modify for her. Tonight we heard another depressing report from Al Bustan neighbourhood in Silwan (Occupied East Jerusalem) where 88 homes (housing 1500 people, 60% of them children) are due for demolition to create "King David park". In a normal city, parks are created to serve the residents of the area not to ethnically cleanse them. Nearby there is enough space for parks to be built but Israel's plan for Jerusalem calls for cleansing it of its Arab inhabitants so that it becomes a Jewish city and therefore capital of Israel forever.

The political plan for this area is actually laid out in the "Jerusalem 2020" plan. After building two rings of settlements around Jerusalem (which are now to be connected with light railways), the plans for further settlements, parks, synagogues, and museums will destroy the homes and land of the local palestinian inhabitants. The fact that Israel is violating international law (Geneva Conventions and UN Security Council resolutions) seems to be met only with muffled protests from the international community.

We are told of a seven-year-old boy, who took a bulging backpack to and from school. When his mother opened the bag, it contained all his toys. When asked about it it turns out that the child had overheard his parents talking about the demolition order on their home and he wanted to make sure that if he comes back from school and finds his home demolished, his most valuable toys would be saved. My heart breaks for these families. But I feel sad for the Zionist "believers" who are generating so much pain in a new generation of children suffering under this brutal colonizing state. How is reconciliation to be achieved when so many people have been made refugees or displaced? Doesn't international law support resistance? And is this resistance just the responsibility of the victims or also of all decent, thinking human beings regardless of their religion.

### **A personal story**

by Dr Swee Ang - Swee Ang is an orthopaedic surgeon, who was deeply changed by the Sabra and Shatilla massacres in 1982. After going into Gaza after the attack in January 2009 & writing a report for the Lancet, she wrote these words about how her views were changed by the earlier massacres.

"I recall how I first came to Sabra and Shatila a bigoted, self-righteous, fundamentalist Christian. I believed in the goodness of the Western "Christian" countries and the righteousness of Israel. I thought I knew the Bible and God was on our side. My favourite stories in the Old Testament at that time were how Joshua captured Jericho, and the story of David and Goliath. I rejoiced in the military triumph of Israel. Just like my Christian friends, I celebrated the great Israeli military victory of the Six Day war of 1967, with subjugation of Gaza and the West Bank. I greeted the Foundation Day of the State of Israel as a day to rejoice.

On that morning in Sabra and Shatila God destroyed that self-righteousness. I was made to confront the broken bodies in the camp alleys. Through them I met the crucified Christ. Sin was no longer an intellectual business. In a split second the sins of hatred, of murder, of militarism, of greed, of anger, of cruelty were all translated into wounds inflicted on the bodies of the victims. The Palestinians were collectively crucified. I felt crucified with them and would have remained so until I remembered as a Christian that crucifixion was not the end. Deep in my Christian consciousness crucifixion is only the prelude to resurrection. Jesus was crucified 2,000 years ago. Both Jesus and the massacred Palestinians were innocent and did not deserve to be tortured and killed. I asked myself again and again – who has got the Palestinians' blood on their hands?

After going through much soul-searching, I came to the conclusion that I, too, had blood on my hands. Up to that time I was bigoted and prejudiced. I cannot excuse myself by claiming ignorance. For the weeks preceding the massacre, I was too prejudiced to believe the stories told to me by the camp people. I rejoiced in the evacuation of the PLO from Beirut and failed to see the pain of the Palestinian families being split up. I was naïve to trust the Western countries that guaranteed the safety of those left behind. I was self-righteous, still thinking of Palestinians as terrorists. I cannot blame others if I who had eaten with them, stayed in their homes, enjoyed their kindness and hospitality, refused to understand until they were murdered. My prejudice had blinded me. When I saw those broken bodies, I was stunned and emotionally numb. I asked God to forgive me and remembered praying, "Lord Jesus, I have spent more than 30 years denying the Palestinian people their existence. I have hated Arabs. I was blinded by prejudice. Please forgive me. Please let me make amends. Grant that I may spend the next 30 years serving the Palestinians and help me be their friend." I repented. God forgave me, and the Palestinians embraced me. Suddenly I am no longer the living dead. God had breathed into my withered soul and filled my heart with love for him and for the Palestinians. He has brought me back to life. Step by step He brought me back to His side."

### **Never understand - Christmas 2009**

by Chris Rose, associate director of Amos Trust

The hopes of a political resolution are once more smouldering and growing cold. The promises of aid to rebuild the ashes of Gaza have proven as worthless as the sand on the shore at Beach Camp.

Independent reports and calls for international justice have once again been denounced.

New Year celebrations will be overshadowed by the commemoration of so many deaths.

The Christmas story reminds us that the promises of politicians and the latest round of peace talks are not where hope is found.

These are the flashlights that dazzle us,

Not the slow burn that glows in the darkest places

The slow realisation

That lies become transparent

That violence will not lead to peace,

That human dignity always exerts itself,

That beauty appears amidst the wreckage,

That our protests are not in vain,

That hope is found in the birth of a child –

In an occupied village.

The miraculous daily promise of new life

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### **Some prayers remain unanswered**

by Chris Rose, associate director of Amos Trust. (Written Christmas 2008)

May the Prince of Peace bring peace to the people of Palestine this Christmas.  
May the children of Bethlehem experience the good news the angels promised.

May the tears that Rachel cried be dried and hope be rekindled for a community that sees so few signs of hope.

May the leaders of the wounded people of Israel and Palestine be guided into the path of peace.

May we support the Christian community and all who seek to build peace and reconciliation in a land we long to call holy

Amen

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