

Israel and Palestine must address issues

BY **BRUCE DUNCAN***

The appalling escalation of violence between Israel and the Palestinians brings a new urgency to settle a conflict which has dragged on for over half a century. Realising that the Palestinian dispute could scupper its efforts to consolidate alliances against terrorism, President Bush has criticised the hawkish policies of Israel and its heavy-handed incursions into Palestinian towns and cities, terrorising the population. Indeed the US has refused to lift its military aid to Israel to help pay for its expanded military activities.

If the people of Israel and Palestine are to know peace, then the fundamental issues must be addressed.

The facts are these. The Palestinians have suffered great injustice by being driven from their homeland by force, with the support of western powers, particularly the United States which continues to give billions of dollars a year to Israel. But there is no way to undo what has been done, and the state of Israel is now widely recognised as legitimate.

However the Palestinian people are still suffering greatly as a result of Israeli policy. Visitors to the Holy Land are often shocked to experience this. In effect, the Palestinian territories are largely under Israeli military occupation still. Nearly four times as many Palestinians as Israelis have been killed in the recent upsurge of violence.

If Israel is not to face another 50 years of conflict, it must be prepared to reach a settlement. This will involve establishing a Palestinian state, basically consisting of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and part of Jerusalem. Israel will have to abandon its settlements on Palestinian land, recognising that handing them over to the Palestinians can be part of the compensation for their dispossession and suffering.

Finally, a process must be established to compensate those Palestinians who have been forced from their lands and homes. This would cost

Israel and the United States a great deal, but much less than the cost of ongoing conflict.

What makes such a settlement so difficult is the polarisation within both Israeli and Palestinian camps. Palestinian militants see themselves as freedom fighters. Suicide bombing is one of the few ways they have to exert pressure on Israel, though in fact it alienates international sympathy by often killing innocent civilians.

In Israel, the hawkish right-wing parties have been a strong influence in the government. Some of these groups want to expel all the Palestinians to restore the biblical boundaries of Greater Israel. As in the past, another war, terrorising the remaining Palestinians to flee, would play right into their hands. Ludicrous as it may seem, these groups believe that such savage and unjust policies could be an instrument of God's will.

Many Palestinians and Israelis reject

Palestinians and the people of Israel are both suffering.

policies of violence and support a settlement allowing both peoples to prosper and live together in peace. Despite the immense difficulties, it is critical they now make giant strides to this goal.

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