

## 12 Elements for a Common Peace Ethics in the Israeli-Palestine Conflict

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### 1) **The shock of the Lebanese mass explosions of communication devices – state terror cannot be the answer to group terror**

Warfare has reached another digital technological level with the implanting of thousands of deadly bombs in every day communication devices in an unprecedented attack on both military as well as civilian populations which is attributed to the Israeli secret service. The shock this has created reaches far beyond the people immediately affected by severe injuries and horrible wounds. It raises deep questions about the moral responsibilities of modern warfare strategies employing highly sophisticated technologies, covert operations and the readiness for totally indiscriminate murders of civilian populations by perverting means of intimate communication with your dear ones, with business partners and with your neighbours into weapons of death and destruction thereby creating an atmosphere of utter insecurity, unreliability and widespread fear. Is it ethically responsible to use the most common means of everyday communication which can be life-saving and crucial in situations of emergency and need for purposes of indiscriminate killing and destruction? People might ask the counter question: And is the firing of 6000 or so missiles by Hezbollah forces on Northern territories of Israel a more morally acceptable act of warfare? Definitely it is not - as equally it is following the principle of indiscriminate acts of violence targeting not only combatants but civilian populations. The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs has clearly passed regulations strictly prohibiting the use of mines, booby-traps and other devices to target civilians, or if their use causes indiscriminate effects or superfluous injuries (Article 3)( Amended Protocol II (APII) to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and addresses the use of mines, booby-traps and other devices (APII).<sup>1</sup> Thus Israels attack is in clear violation of international humanitarian law. The constant invention of new deadly technologies applied in actual warfare without any previous ethical clearance committee is an imperative for the international community to rethink the mechanism and ethical standards which are behind the UN CCW protocols and to sharpen criteria and sanction mechanisms in this regard. We need a new and open international ethical discourse: What are ethically legitimate acts of defence and what are totally illegitimate acts of either group or state terrorism? Pondering these questions underlines that just another round of countering group terrorism by clear acts of state terrorism cannot provide an answer in the search for exist strategies to the vicious circles of violence, counter-violence, brutalities and counter-brutalities. Instead of de-escalating and trying to convey an image of oneself interested in

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<sup>1</sup> See the “Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)” which addresses the use of mines, booby-traps and other devices, i.e., “manually emplaced munitions and devices including improvised explosive devices designed to kill, injure or damage and which are actuated manually, by remote control or automatically after a lapse of time” (Article 2, para. 5), during international and non-international armed conflicts. In: <https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Added-value-of-Amended-Protocol-II.pdf>; But what is the value of these important international legal restrictions if a state like Isarel, which has even signed the CCW Protocol in the year 2000, is able to bluntly violate this important legal regulation to limit the use if highly sophisticated weapons causing indiscriminate victims amongst the civilian population? See the original treaty and protocol in: 2. b Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices as amended on 3 May 1996 (Protocol II, as amended on 3 May 1996) annexed to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to have Indiscriminate Effects, in: [https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XXVI-2-b&chapter=26&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVI-2-b&chapter=26&clang=_en)

peace which could open doors for negotiations with the enemy the image of an insidious and immoral military power is reinforced. The opposite military power strategy is followed which is based on the assumption that every means is ethically justified as long as a maximum of destruction can be inflicted upon the enemy. This strategy is only good for constantly creating new deep wounds of traumatization remembered for generations, which incites additional hatred and even makes any truce and hostages exchange agreement with Hamas forces in the Gaza strip an almost unreachable goal now. Why is a state which prides itself of being a state of democratic principles, respect for human rights and ethical codes enshrined in a common legal system so utterly failing to integrate universally accepted ethical principles of peace building into its policies, even into the military policies? Why does it seem too difficult to accept a different strategy of reaching its goals – a lasting peace with Palestinian populations?

## **2) International responsibilities to deal with a comprehensive set of ethical principles of peace for situations of war, use of digital technologies in warfare, non-violent means of conflict-solving and exit strategies from entrenched military conflicts**

The horrifying example of the recent terrorist attacks in Lebanon point to an urgent need for the international community to deal with key issues of peace ethics and ethics of warfare as technological changes and advances in military technologies have shifted the boundaries between what is technically possible and what can be employed in real life situations. The modern humanitarian law started 1848 with the first Geneva Convention expressing red lines and basic protection principles for wounded soldiers in war, thus trying to maintain some basis human standards over against vulnerable and sectors of the population.<sup>2</sup> The International Red Cross was a major think tank and global actor pressing for further humanitarian standards to be agreed upon even between countries at war with each other. Later the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 additional protocols provide the core of the humanitarian law system to protect victims of internal and international armed conflict. Today we are in a historically new situation as the fast “progress” of military technologies, combined with highly sophisticated digitization technologies and software programs employing artificial intelligence have entered the war arenas and influence heavily what can be done and what actually is practically done by many without any ethical code of checking and making people accountable. New technological advances have raised concerns about lethal autonomous weapons and cyberattacks, the weaponization of bots and drones, the invisible deployment of bombs inside of digital means of communications or the livestreaming of extremist attacks in social media.<sup>3</sup> There is also a significant rise in both criminal and state secret service activities involving data hacks and ransomware, as well as fake information and deliberate misinformation campaigns as elements of a hybrid culture of warfare. We urgently need a new Geneva Convention on the Digitization of Warfare and Ethical Principles to limit destructive impacts of modern war technologies. It thus becomes clear that the international community of states which still has an interest in a reliable international order and civilized ways of conflict solution needs to spell out basic principles of an ethics of peace which needs to be unfolded in several distinct dimensions and stages:

- Ethics of preventing conflicts and curbing spread of hatred, enmity and false propaganda in situation of looming conflicts;

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance: Nina Tannenwald: How the Revolution of 1848 Enabled the Geneva Conventions, in: <https://schweizermonat.ch/how-the-revolution-of-1848-enabled-the-geneva-conventions/>

<sup>3</sup> See on this for instance the UN paper on “A New Era of Conflict and Violence”, in: <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence>

- Ethics of non-violent and diplomatic conflict solution in situation of hardened political or social conflicts;
- Ethics of limiting inhumane and terrorist use of sophisticated weapons and means of hybrid warfare within an escalating conflict situation;
- Ethics of peace in situation where a dominant power suppressed and violates the national integrity of a weaker country and nation or group (“responsibility to protect”)
- Ethics of peace for a preparatory process for peace negotiations and an exit strategy of entrenched armed conflicts;
- Ethics of peace understood as established order for a just peace and common security system between two or more parties involved which guarantees an alternative political order and compromise

Only if the international community as well as states involved in armed conflicts make a deliberate decision to invest more in methodologies of non-violent conflict solution than in military arms race and military equipment a radical turn of the era (“Zeitenwende”) from a focus on the ability for warfare to the ability to reconstruct peace can occur, (from martial capabilities (“Kriegstüchtigkeit”) to peace capabilities (“Friedenstüchtigkeit”).

**3) One-sided attention of international and western media on governments and military leads to distorted and incomplete perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

Current international media attention is focussing too much on the military actions and the official positions of governmental and military leader’s positions, but less on the voices of those affected by the war, by religious extremism, by violence and occupation. Several experts have repeatedly stated that the voices of civil society actors need to be listened to much more in any effort contributing to a long-term diplomatic and dialogical solution of the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Only if future oriented and serious voices from civil society actors are seriously integrated into the political discourse as a distinct and valid voice contributing to a lasting peace and justice accord, we can make any progress. Amongst the civil society actors religious representatives and actors have a distinct and important role, though not being the only ones which should be listened to.

**4) The growing importance of civil society actors and peace initiatives from both sides needs to be realized for articulating essential ethical dimensions**

There are more than 200 active civil society organizations both in Israel, where the past months have seen an extraordinary mobilization of civil society actors both in the area of the release of the hostages as well as the threat juridical reform and attempted changes of legal changes limiting the controlling and balancing powers of the High Court of Israel over against the government. The aim of many of these peace and dialogue initiatives - the Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP) lists around 160 member organizations - is to question simplifying binary thought structures, one-sided victim-perpetrator perceptions and reductionist friend-enemy schemes and to enable both sides to contribute to dialogue and peace processes at local and regional levels. Although there is a smaller, but significant number of joint Israeli and Palestine civil society peace groups the civil space still available for free operational activities of these groups both in the West Banks as well as in the Gaza Strip has become much more severely limited both due to the ongoing war and military activities, but also due to indiscriminate and unpredictable acts of violence by the religious extremists of the Israeli settler’s movements. On July 1, 2024, the first all-Israeli gathering of civil society organizations and Palestinian activists (mostly connected digitally due to travel restrictions) took place in Tel Aviv, which brought thousands of people together under the motto: “The

time has come to stop the war, to end the conflict, and to make peace. Enough! The time has come.” But who in politics, society and churches in western countries knows the great diversity of peace policy initiatives there? There is a great need for more detailed and accurate, less biased information in western mass media.

**5) Overcoming lack of engagement, inertia and fear concerning public engagement for the principles of double solidarity in the Israeli-Palestine conflict in western countries**

Time has come in countries like Germany, but also in several other countries to examine any withdrawal into public silence and to overcome any lack of explicit engagement with the challenges of peace in the Middle East as well as any one-sided bias in their public positioning ignoring the tremendous sufferings which both sides have endured. The double solidarity which for years churches have expressed with the Jewish people seeking a place of safety and home after centuries of persecution and even extinction in the Holocaust as well as with the Palestinian churches and Palestinian Muslims in Israel which have lost many parts of their homeland due to the wars fought in the past after the founding of the Israeli state in 1948 has been put to a fundamental test with the horrific atrocities caused by the terrorist attacks by Hamas on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023. Ties of relationship and trust between Jews and Palestinians in many countries have suffered or were severed. A spirit of fear, of suspicion, sometimes open hatred and antisemitism as well as Islamophobia has increased in many parts of Europe.

**6) The ongoing task of building bridges even in a situation of utmost estrangement and mistrust – lack of empathy for deeply rooted narratives of traumatization on both sides as core challenge**

Over against this increased sense and threat of polarization and deepened ideological, political and religious frontiers it needs to be stated with utmost clarity: The task of religious actors, sober-minded experts, political as well as religious leaders should be to build bridges even in situations where communication seems to be breaking apart and many efforts of decades of peace work seemed to be getting lost in a couple of few weeks. At the core of the conflict between two people located in one piece of land is a deep lack of empathy for the wounds of traumatization the other side has experienced. Both people Jews as well as Palestinians have their distinct and different historical experiences of deep traumatization and generation-long estrangements following from that. The system of structural separation which marks wide sectors of public and social life on both the Israeli and Palestinian side in the system of occupation does not allow Israelis to listen and learn from the experience of Palestinian families having suffered from their relatives being imprisoned under inhumane conditions in Israeli detention centres, nor can they participate with an attitude of dialogue, openness and empathy to memories of the NAKBA and the enforced expulsion of Palestinian families during the late 40ies and early 50ies from their territories in Palestine. On the other hand the current system of entrenched structural separation between Israeli areas and Palestine areas, often separated due to the brutality of a tall wall of separation, does not allow Palestinians to share in the stories and the memory of Israeli families on how their predecessors lost their lives in Nazi concentration camps or where brutally persecuted all over in Europe during the Nazi regime. Lack of mutual understanding and genuine open forms of encounter and learning from each other leads to cementing and reinforcing of hostile images and stereotypes which are often transmitted to the subsequent generation without being filtered and changed, thereby making even deeper attitudes of mistrust and hostility.

**7) Joint liturgies of mourning as one of the key avenues for dialogue and healing in the midst of ongoing traumatization**

Civil society initiatives like Parents Circle or Combatants for peace, women wage peace or many others have lived out alternative ways of joint celebrations of mourning parents who have lost their children due to violence on both sides, thereby showing what kind of deeper process of healing of memories and recognition of pain on the other side would be needed if a process of rapprochement between the two people is to be achieved still in lifetime. While there are alternative models and values which could lead to a precondition for an emerging common peace ethics for both sides there is a contrasting totally different logic at work in the arena of official Israeli politics and partly also on the Palestinian side which operates under the assumption that any violence needs to be countered with an act of revenge and only a military solution of destroying the enemy has the potential to create a lasting sense of security for Israeli citizens. But the example of the Gaza war which has caused more than 37000 Palestinians to lose their lives, amongst them many civilians, women and children, has also shown that military power alone does not create conditions for a lasting peace as it is failing to develop a clear overall post-war scenario and it is not recognizing any interest of the other side (for instance freedom of access to Gaza strip and the end of the blockade) as a legitimate demand. Thus the official political level does not seem to take into consideration alternative political options which have been prepared and are partly lived out by a minority of the Israeli society (and a growing majority of global Jewish voices) but seems captive by its own limited military logic, although increasingly also contested even by military leaders from the Israeli side.

**8) There is no difference in value between Palestinian and Israeli lives – We need more sensitivity and empathy to the suffering of both sides**

Sensitivity to the suffering – from whatever side – cannot be limited to just one party in the conflict. Each life is tremendously precious – this is a core conviction of all religious traditions. An ethics of a responsible peace therefore starts with the question on how to restore and protect the dignity, safety and security of each individual person, the elderly, the children, the women on both sides. There is no difference in value between Palestinian and Israeli lives. An ethics of just and responsible peace starts with affirming the legitimacy of common citizenship and common responsibility for an approach of sharing the limited resources of a given limited territory which is claimed by both sides, but can only be responsibly administered if resources are not wasted by investing in costly security devices, fences, walls against each other as well as sophisticated weapons used to continue occupation, but are invested in common security systems which strengthen equal citizenship, human rights, transparency and mutual access to clearly defined territories on both sides.

**9) Peace ethics is dependent on a special sensitivity to language, the relevance of different key terms for both sides and barriers of communication in different socio-political contexts**

Any relevant peace ethics in or for the Middle East conflict needs a special sensitivity with regard to language. The gravity of the conflict as well as the dynamic of huge propaganda machines on both sides has poisoned certain terms so that – if used in any common conversation - terms cannot serve as a point of common reference and understanding or need a special translation and re-contextualization. One ought to be careful with the selection of terms to describe the current situation as several terms claim a special connotation depending in which context inside or outside the Middle East they are used. The term “boycott” for instance might evoke the horrifying first experience of Jews during the Nazi Period to be excluded from any public and economic life as a first step to their

annihilation, where are on some Palestinian solidarity groups, particularly those which are connected with the experiences from the South African liberation struggle against Apartheid this term signifies a first experience of liberation from below, being supported by strong solidarity networks from the US and from Europe at that time. In a similar vein terms like “Apartheid,” “ethnic cleansing,” “racism,” “colonialism,” “genocide” , each of them rooted in very specific regional, legal and political contexts easily become labels when used as easy political tool applied in political debates which can often replace nuanced analysis. Likewise, there are many cases in which the disqualification of legitimate criticism of government policies in Israel by using the term “anti-Semitic” is done very easily and thus often suggests that conclusions are drawn too quickly. The discourses around peace ethics in the Middle East therefore needs great sensitivity with the use of terms and always deliberate efforts for a double contextualization being aware that connotations of terms might differ whether you speak in a European, or in a Middle East or in a certain international or ecumenical context, whether to a Palestinian or an Israeli audience.

#### **10) Standing up for essential principles of peace ethics is an act of resilience, hope and reconstruction and a bulwark against religious and political extremism**

Peace ethics in the Israeli and Palestine context today has to almost try the impossible and to really swim against the stream. Almost never have the conditions for peace ethics been so grim, adversary and repudiated against like today: The terror attacks of Hamas have gravely shattered the security promise of the Israeli state, they have also made more moderate Palestinian circles and organizations much less visible and in the forefront than military organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas. At the same time, the massive military operations in the Gaza Strip and the disproportionate use of force in many places by the IDF have inflicted deep new wounds and have almost completely destroyed the trust of the young Palestinian population in particular in a still possible peace process. The hopes for a two-state solution have become rather distant for large parts of the population on both sides. The voices of those who are of the opinion that peace cannot be made with the Palestinians (or the Israelis) have been and are still being encouraged, and feelings of depression, powerlessness and hopelessness are increasing. In the shadow of the Gaza war, militant settler violence by religious Jewish nationalists and violent attacks against Palestinian families in the occupied areas of the West Bank have increased dramatically in recent months – often unnoticed or underreported by international media. Thus, today there are extremist factions on both sides who are torpedoing and successfully blocking any progress in the Middle East peace process. This is dangerous for a future of Israel in security, peace and justice and also for the future of Palestine. How can the spiral of violence be stopped and the logic of retaliation and the destruction or repression of the other put an end to? Religious actors in Europe as well as in Germany have an important bridging function thanks to their diverse network of relationships with the Middle East. They should ask themselves where in the region there are still reliable, strong, and if necessary also *new* partners which have the potential for a diplomatic solution in view of the increasing polarization within both Israeli and Palestinian society. Religious and engaged interfaith or secular actors should offer platforms for public articulation for groups that develop the ability to develop empathy with both sides. Religious and interfaith actors have the task of looking for actors of moderation, dialogue and reconciliation which work with a primary focus on basic human rights and a binding orientation to UN decisions related to the conflict which are existing in international law. They should resist the pressure of co-optation from those who want to force dual solidarity and attitudes of empathy into an either/or logic, in which commitment to the concerns of one side immediately raises suspicion of neglect or even betrayal on the other side.

**11) The refusal to engage in a more comprehensive and long-term political solutions has its terrible price – how to break the vicious cycle of revenge and violence**

The constant long-term refusal to engage in a more comprehensive political solution by both sides has caused massive damage to both Israel and Palestine. It has now led to a situation in which the social and economic costs of neglecting and postponing a constructive solution have taken on gigantic dimensions. This will result in generation-long burdens and unforeseeable consequences for the future of both Palestinian and Israeli societies. The one-sided fixation on military solutions based on the logic of total victory and total defeat on both sides (“ Hamas must be destroyed”; “ Israel must be destroyed”) runs the risk - despite the understandable impulse for self-defence – to structurally neglect effective, sustainable long-term concepts for securing peace. This brings us to a core concern of the religious actors, namely peace, reconciliation, healing of memories instead of continuing the cycle of violence and retaliation. The political focus on military solutions, which comes at an extremely high price for the civilian population, leads to the conflict being made permanent and the causes that lead to it constantly being deepened. The role of international partners, in contrast, can only be aimed at emphatically insisting on a rapid solution to the hostage issue, on a ceasefire, on the establishment of a new civil administration in the Gaza Strip with international participation and on pushing back the militant Israeli settler movement, in order to end the occupation of Palestinian territories. It must be remembered again and again: Israel's security can only be achieved together with the security of Palestine, not without or against it. The warning from critical Jewish voices must be heard clearly: “If the German government wants to take the commitment to Israel’s security seriously as a *raison d’être*, it must also accept a conflict with Israel’s government. What's more: If Israel's security is to be part of Germany's *raison d'état*, such a conflict does not mean interference in the affairs of another sovereign state, as is often automatically claimed by the Israeli side, but rather it is a conflict within the framework of a common sphere of interests...It was already clear before October 7th...that the Israeli government is the greatest threat to the country and the region and that Germany's tolerance towards this government therefore needs to be seen as a betrayal of the task of viewing Israel's security as German *raison d'être*.”<sup>4</sup>

**12) There is no peace without justice, no justice without security, no security without respect for the land and a shared land approach. There is no peace for Israel without justice for the Palestinians and vice versa**

The key to a contextual peace ethics for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an inclusive notion of justice. Justice includes intra-generational, inter-generational as well as inter-species justice.<sup>5</sup> It presupposes the establishment of structures of just relationships between generations of Jews and Palestinians living at the same time in the same country but still struggling to create a system of distribution of land access, justice and rights which gives both of them equal opportunities. It presupposes establishing just relationships between different generations, so that current generations of Jews and Palestinians cannot spoil and destroy and vandalize current resources of the land in a way which makes live impossible for the generations to follow. And justice presupposes just relationships between humanity and other living species as well as the ecological balances which we need to respect within planetary boundaries, knowing for sure that protracted wars and its destructive consequences make not only

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<sup>4</sup> Mosche Zimmermann, *Niemals Frieden? Israel am Scheideweg*, Propyläen Edition, 2024, p. 54

<sup>5</sup> See the groundbreaking study of the Earth Commission from Johan Rockström and others: *Safe and Just Earth System Boundaries*, published in *Nature Journal* 31. May 2023, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-023-06083-8>

human beings suffer tremendously but animals, plants and the whole realm of living organisms on earth.