

Archbishop Justin's piece commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration was published in the Telegraph on 2nd November 2017.

Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration provides an opportunity to recognise its historical significance and the weight and reach of its legacy. As a country, we are reminded that the British government created the conditions for a profound national and political reconfiguring in the Middle East.

In November 1917 the government declared its approval of the “establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”. The provision enshrined in the Balfour Declaration had given Jews the hope of self-determination, sanctuary and return to the land that they had been exiled from since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. For those fleeing persecution in Europe and for those ideologically and theologically committed to Zionism, aspiration had turned to reality.

There is less clarity of intent for the Palestinian people in the assertion that “nothing should be done which might prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”. There does not appear to be a plan for the consequences of the inevitable changes in demographics in Palestine and the attendant need for homes, land and work. The Palestinian communities were not given parity of provision for their own desire for independence, self-determination and statehood.

Later, as holders of the Mandate for Palestine, Britain assumed a “sacred trust of civilisation” for both the welfare of the Palestinian people and their path to independence. That aspiration for independent statehood has not been fulfilled yet and remains a root cause of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians today.

The vocation of the Church is to pray. In prayer, we bring before God the needs of the world and we cry out to God, lamenting the suffering of others and repenting of our own complicity, culpability and negligence in their plight. In prayer we are called also to listen to God, to discern God’s will and to act in obedience to the call of God to be engaged in reconciliation, transformation and the flourishing of all people.

We commit ourselves to pray and to act for the flourishing of Palestinians and for the exercise of self-determination in the establishing of a viable and secure state

The state of Israel is flourishing and this anniversary will be marked by celebration there and within the Jewish community here. This is a community that continues to be confronted by the stark daily reality of prejudice, hostility and violence in Europe and throughout the world. We reaffirm our commitment to work to combat the virulent nature of contemporary anti-Semitism wherever it appears and to pray for peace and security for Israel.

For Palestinian self-determination to be realised, there is a need for significant investment of time, attention and diplomacy from the

international community and especially Britain. No good can come from despair and a collective lack of hope. We commit ourselves to pray and to act for the flourishing of Palestinians and for the exercise of self-determination in the establishing of a viable and secure state.

There can be no more fitting way to mark the anniversary of the signing of the Balfour Declaration than to commit ourselves to pray in thanksgiving for the land which provides a home for Israelis and Palestinians; for the thriving of Jews, Christians and Muslims there; and to pray too for the fulfilment of what remains unfinished in aspirations for statehood, security and peace.

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