



Opinion: The Current Events in Israel's Mixed Cities

We, the faculty, staff and alumni of the School for Peace, in the village of Wahat al-Salam Neve Shalom (Oasis of Peace), Jews and Arabs, have, as a community, been following the events of the recent days with abhorrence and disgust. The mixed cities, where much of the violence has been taking place, are home to citizens who are Israeli-Palestinians, a valid, national, indigenous minority; and to citizens who are Jewish Israelis.

Our community of the School for Peace includes activists working in the mixed cities, human rights lawyers, mental health professionals, educators, environmental activists, journalists, urban planners and local political leaders. We are angered at what we see as very dangerous occurrences taking place within our mixed cities and our common, shared areas.

The violence being perpetrated Jews and Palestinians is asymmetrical. Jews are being supported by a racist ideology and an accomplice establishment who aim to disrupt the fragile weave of relations between Jews and Palestinians. It has been fanned by incitement and goading of groups on both sides to commit acts of violence. The police have not fulfilled their duty, either by declining to intervene or using excessive displays of violence, both of which have contributed the atmosphere of fear and terror on the streets.

The larger blame for the current situation can be attributed to the negligence throughout the country in dealing with crime and violence within Arab communities – negligence that has gone on for years, and which has weakened the local Palestinian leadership and given impetus to violent acts and criminal elements. These are now fanning the flames of violence in our cities. The Israeli Palestinian population has suffered, since the establishment of the state, from neglect and discrimination in areas that range from infrastructure to education and housing. In the mixed cities, this discrimination is especially egregious; Jewish residents receive preferential treatment in these and more. In this situation of inequality, we call not only for nonviolence, but for equality, for justice for all citizens and actions to remedy the injustices.

Another factor in the violence has been the behavior of the military toward Palestinians in the Old City of Jerusalem and in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarakh. As the Palestinian people are engaged in a struggle for independence, aggressive tactics within Jerusalem encourage Palestinians outside Israel's borders to identify with those within, and vice versa.

Even as the current cycle of violence continues, politicians and the media negate Palestinian identity and dehumanize them, to the point of championing racial purity. We are witnesses to the skewed treatment they receive in the media; there is a lack of diversity in the voices that are heard, a lack of joint Jewish-Arab positions aired calling for equal treatment. Instead, we see the stage given over to victim-blaming and legitimization of the government's lack of vision, policy or the accepting of responsibility. Our voice, which calls for an equal civil society and fair coexistence, has been silenced.

The current outbreak of violence is the fruit of the long-standing government policies of "conflict management," while neglecting any chances for dialogue or movement toward attaining an agreed-upon solution to the conflict. The situation today has its roots in the burial of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and the continuation of policies of settlement and those designed to ensure Jewish hegemony through force, rather than pursuing a peace agreement with Palestinians.

The School for Peace

In addition, the use of military police practices within Israel's mixed cities encourages extremists from the Jewish far right, including settlers, to come into those cities and ignite the tinderboxes there.

This outbreak, unfortunately, serves the interests of those in Israel's government, including its head, who are struggling to maintain their power and have been using it for their own political purposes.

We, the alumni of the School for Peace, believe the only way to attain peace and calm it through real dialogue between Jews, Palestinian citizens of Israel and citizens of Palestine – dialogue in which all are equal partners in seeking a solution to the conflict.

For more information contact:

Ibrahim Agbaria - iagbaria@gmail.com

Dr. Roi Silberberg – roi@nswas.info