



- P1 | ISRAEL-PALESTINE** *The peace process is in the spotlight again as nations at the Paris summit called for renewed efforts, and Palestinian factions agreed in Moscow to form a unity government.*
- P2 | SOUTH AFRICA** *The 'One China' policy—a thorny issue between China and their trading partners—has caused problems for a South African politician.*
- P3 | EUROPE** *The debate about Muslim integration in Europe was reignited after the ruling by a European court in favour of Swiss officials*
- P4 | PUBLICATIONS** *The 'Hope for Syria' calendar sales are making an impact in people's lives, and there are still some available.*



ISRAEL AND PALESTINE—AN ELUSIVE PEACE



not to utilise its permanent veto power and thereby allowing the resolution to pass.

The US House of Representatives, however, subsequently supported a proposal condemning the UN resolution. Legislation that gained a broad bipartisan (Republican and Democratic) support, passing 342 to 80, was drafted in refutation of the UN condemnation of Israeli settlements. This was a rebuke of the Obama administration's refusal to veto the UNSC resolution, with the House stating that it had "undermined" America's long-held position of opposing anti-Israel action at the UN.

On Monday afternoon (16 January), the UK – in what is considered a highly irregular move – blocked the EU Foreign Affairs Council decision to adopt the closing statement of the weekend's Paris conference, a day after they refused to sign the statement. While the UK's actions angered numerous EU members, they were not alone in their reservations. The move by the UK is considered an 'about turn', just three weeks after they voted in favour of the UN resolution against Israel.

The future role of Donald Trump?

US president-elect Donald Trump has forcefully backed the Israeli government since winning the election, and his team voiced their objection to the Paris summit when they met with French diplomats ahead of the gathering. At the summit, France's foreign minister said that Mr Trump's proposal to move the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (another flashpoint issue) would be a provocation with serious consequences.

Donald Trump's foreign policy remains untested and somewhat vague, but he has repeatedly expressed his displeasure with the way the Obama administration has approached Israel and the peace process. He has also publicly expressed a desire to make what he called the "ultimate deal" between Israel and Palestine, but what this will entail remains to be seen.

THE NUMBERS: ISRAEL-PALESTINE



1948

The year in which the modern state of Israel was founded



2

The number of peace treaties Israel has with Arab nations—Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994)



1964

The year the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) was formed



122 to 71

The number of countries who support Palestine joining the UN compared to the number opposed

A two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the only way to bring lasting peace and security to the Middle East, French President Francois Hollande said as officials and civil society groups from more than 70 countries gathered to discuss ways of bringing Israel and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table. The summit on the stalled peace process was the second called by France in the last eight months. Neither Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, nor Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas attended the summit, which led many observers to question its significance. (*Al Jazeera*)

Recent developments in a complex issue

Outgoing US Secretary of State John Kerry attended the summit (held this past weekend) in what some see as a final effort to advocate for the 'two-state solution' he strongly endorsed last month. In his strongly-worded statement of 28 December, Kerry said that Israel's settlements in the West Bank are obstacles to the peace process. "No one thinking seriously about peace can ignore the reality of what the settlements pose to that peace," he said, calling on the Israeli prime minister to end the settlements and allow Palestinian development.

Israeli officials and supporters were deeply concerned by Kerry's remarks, especially as they followed closely after the unanimous approval and passing of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 on 23 December, which declared the settlements illegal. Much to Israel's dismay, the United States abstained from the vote, choosing

NEWS HEADLINES



It will be the largest Coptic Church in **Egypt**, inaugurated by 2018 in the new capital which is being built on the margin of Cairo's metropolis, and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi will be among its direct sponsors. The announcement of the project was given by the same al Sisi on the occasion of his participation in the Christmas liturgy in the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo, celebrated by Patriarch Tawadros II.



Former **Iranian** president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani died on 8 January at the age of 82, a big blow to moderates and reformists now deprived of their most influential supporter. Iran's long-marginalised reformists and moderates, who would use Mr Rafsanjani's regular calls for more personal freedoms and requests to establish better relations with the United States to advance their political agendas, suddenly feel exposed and weakened.



Nearly a fifth more migrants arrived in **Italy** by boat in 2016, setting a record and bringing the three-year total to more than half a million, the Interior Ministry said. Of those approximately 25,800 were unaccompanied or separated children – that's more than double the 12,360 who arrived during the previous year.

Palestinian attempts at reconciliation

While many nations attended the weekend's Paris summit, representatives of Palestine's fractured leadership travelled to Moscow at the invitation of Russian officials to discuss the possibility of restoring national unity, seen to be an essential part of a peaceful resolution of the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict. Palestine has not held general elections for over 10 years, and the Palestinian National Council, the legislative body of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), last convened in 1996. Fatah was the dominant party in Palestine until 1987 when Hamas emerged as a resistance movement to Israeli occupation, and when a violent conflict broke out between Fatah and Hamas members in 2007, the Palestinian Authority split and Hamas gained control of the Gaza Strip.

On Wednesday 18 January, it was announced that Fatah and Hamas have agreed to establish a Palestinian unity government. The Palestinian factions – including the Islamic Jihad (listed by numerous Western governments as a terrorist organisation) – will join the PLO institutions and form a new Palestinian National Council. A senior Fatah official mentioned the recent peace conference in Paris, the UNSC resolution criticising the settlements, and Donald Trump's election as some of the reasons behind the deal.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

President Hollande's statement that a two-state solution is "the only way to bring lasting peace and security to the Middle East" raises an

interesting point. Can the little nation of Israel be the answer to peace throughout the Middle East, where wars seem to be raging almost constantly?

Todd Deatherage, executive director and cofounder of *Telos* (a pro-peace movement), believes that there is a "third way" to achieving peace in the Israel-Palestine conflict, rather than choosing to back one of the two sides: "Any just end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires an honest diplomatic process, accompanied by vigorous bridge-building and reconciliation at the grassroots level. One needs to take seriously Jesus' admonition that 'blessed are the peacemakers' and seek to live that out by identifying with those on both sides who are working for peace. This third way rejects the idea that either side will ever get what it wants through the use of violence or force, or at the other's expense. Peace-making can provide hope for a better future, re-humanise those who have been robbed of their humanity, help enemies live as neighbours who do not fear each other, correct imbalances of power, and create opportunities for mutual flourishing."

Such radical peace-making is entirely countercultural in a world of 'winner-takes-all'.

PRAY > For genuine peace-makers on both sides to be involved in the process > For there to be recognition of each groups' needs > For believers to offer hope and be the "bridge-builders" between communities

THE 'ONE CHINA' POLICY—A THORNY ISSUE



various nations and China? According to *BBC News*, the policy is "the diplomatic acknowledgement of China's position that there is only one Chinese government" (meaning that countries wanting relations with China must not pursue ties with Taiwan, which chose to break away from mainland China). This policy is the basis for all China's other policy-making and for Chinese diplomacy throughout the world.

Taiwan, as a result of China forcing countries to forgo relations with the island nation, has been in diplomatic isolation since 1949. *BBC News* explained how the policy traces back to the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949: "The defeated Nationalists, also known as the Kuomintang, retreated to Taiwan and made it their seat of government while the victorious Communists began ruling the mainland as the People's Republic of China. Both sides said they represented all of China." Mainland China has gone so far as to threaten Taiwan with military action if the island ever declares independence.

China's economic grip

As with other Chinese trading partners, South Africa has a lot to lose when it comes to meddling with the 'One China' policy. South Africa is a member of the BRICS alliance (together with Brazil, Russia, India and China), and therefore has a good economic relationship with China. The two countries also co-

The South African Department of International Relations and Co-operation said it warned Tshwane mayor Solly Msimanga he would be violating South Africa's [position on the] 'One China' policy by visiting Taiwan to drum up investor support. Msimanga, on an opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) ticket, disregarded this and went ahead with the trip to the breakaway state, placing him in breach of South Africa's foreign policy. When the ANC caucus at the Metro found out about Msimanga's trip it accused him of betraying the Brics alliance and said he should be charged with treason for going ahead with the trip. (*NEWS24*)

The 'One China' policy in brief

What is the 'One China' policy and why is it a potential powder keg of confrontation between

NEWS HEADLINES



The "House of Fatwa" (Dar al Ifta al Misryah), the **Egyptian** body presided by the Grand Mufti of Egypt and responsible for disseminating guidance pronouncements and dissolve doubts and disputes regarding the application of the precepts of the Koran, has issued a ruling to confirm that it is absolutely legitimate to allow Christians to build churches in an Islamic nation, with due observance of the State laws.



Pakistan Prime Minister Sharif has defended religious minorities during his participation at the inauguration of the Hindu Kata Raj temple. He added that believers of all religions should have equal rights in Pakistan. Hindu and Christian representatives in Pakistan, the main religious minorities in the country, expressed their appreciation for the words of the Prime Minister.



Iraqi government troops say they are in "full control" of east Mosul three months into a major operation to recapture the country's second city, despite some IS fighters remaining along the Tigris river. The Iraqi army's Lt Gen Talib Shaghathi, who commands the counter-terrorism forces, hailed what he called a "big victory".

chair the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC). China is South Africa's largest single trading partner, with bilateral trade surpassing \$400 billion in 2015, and if China halted its investment for even a short period (in response to Msimanga's reaching out to Taiwan), the South African economy would suffer.

Meanwhile, the 'One China' policy has caused major uproar in the United States. US president-elect Donald Trump recently hinted that his administration might reconsider the policy, triggering a backlash from Beijing – the state-run Chinese tabloid Global Times warned Mr Trump that China would "take revenge" if he changed US recognition of the 'One China' policy. Rex Tillerson, Mr Trump's choice for Secretary of State, has already taken a confrontational stance with China, telling the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "China's building of islands [in the South China Seas] and putting military assets on those islands was akin to Russia's taking Crimea from Ukraine" and stating that "we [the Trump administration] are going to have to send China a clear signal that, first, the island-building stops and, second, your access to those islands also is not going to be allowed."

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

China is willing to negotiate on many issues, but not on the 'One China' policy, and there would be multiple repercussions for a country choosing to oppose it. South Africa hosts more than 350 000 Chinese foreign nationals, to whom the Church has an opportunity to reach out. On a regional level, South Africa is the 'economic gateway' to Southern Africa (like it is a gateway country for

Christian missions), and China is making full use thereof – there are currently more than one million Chinese living throughout Africa, with South Africa and Angola hosting up to 60 percent of that number.

Yuan Jirong and Huang Jingjing explain the mission significance of this: "As trade and communication between China and Africa grows, so too has the Chinese presence on the continent. But due to language barriers, safety issues and cultural differences, Chinese usually live a life of isolation. Discovering the belief vacuum, some Chinese missionaries have stepped in. They are becoming a third force beside government bodies and business tycoons providing newly arrived Chinese workers with prompt language and legal assistance, and the love and care they so sorely lack."

Initiatives like the Southern Africa Chinese Outreach Network (SACON) are reaching thousands of Chinese workers throughout Africa, with the added focus of equipping converted Chinese Christians to take the Gospel back to their homeland. With all the hype and uncertainty surrounding the 'One China' policy, and China's economic sway over Africa, the 'One China' policy (and South Africa's position on it) may influence Christian outreach to the million plus Chinese in Africa in untold ways in the future.

PRAY > For righteous dealings between China and Taiwan > For the outreach to Chinese workers across Africa not to be hindered by international dealings > For growth in the Kingdom as economic ties expand

MUSLIM INTEGRATION IN EUROPE



In 2008, school officials in Basel, Switzerland, ordered a Muslim couple to enrol their daughters in a mandatory swimming class, despite the parents' objections to having their girls learn alongside boys. On [the 10th of January this year], the European Court of Human Rights upheld the Swiss officials' decision, rejecting the parents' argument that the Swiss authorities had violated the "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights, which the court enforces. (*New York Times*)

The challenge of Muslim integration in Europe

Long before the Arab Spring uprising (in 2011) forced millions of people from the Middle East to flee to Europe and the rest of the 'free West', European society consisted of a mixture of races,

languages and subcultures. The First and Second World Wars 'set the stage' for the formation of subcultures throughout Europe, as many were displaced during those times of conflict. These forced migrants were, however, still 'European', unlike the new wave of incomers from the Middle East whose cultures are often strikingly different to those of their European hosts.

Islamic culture, often seen as more conservative than that of Europe, is viewed by many as a threat to European values. Europeans generally prize their secular values, so it was no surprise that politicians and civic groups welcomed the recent court ruling in Switzerland, calling it "an important validation of the supremacy of secularism and the rule of law" (*NY Times*). Muslims in Switzerland, however, complained that the ruling reflected a growing intolerance towards religious minorities. Qaasim Illi, a board member of the Swiss Central Islamic Council, said that "the swimming pool verdict unfortunately is what we expected" and wrote on Twitter that "tolerance toward the religious is diminishing throughout Europe".

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

The influx of Muslim refugees/migrants to Europe has opened doors for the proclamation of the Gospel that have never been seen before, and in

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response to the Church reaching out, the face of Christian Europe is beginning to change. But key issues of integration could close these new doors of opportunity. The challenge that host governments are facing, with increasing pressure from citizens, is determining whether (and how much) a secular government should accommodate the religious views of Muslim citizens, migrants and refugees. Another critical question that integration raises is whether peace between such divergent cultures is possible: one is conservative, the other liberal; one is religious, the other secular.

For some, these questions have a simple answer: no. They believe that conservative Muslims cannot be fully integrated into secular European society because a clash of cultures is inevitable, and that governments should not compromise European values for the sake of a minority group. The Berlin Christmas market attack that claimed the lives of 12 people in December of 2016 further validated right-wing groups' opposition to Muslim integration and their claim that peace between Christian or secular Europeans and incoming Middle Eastern Muslims is impossible.

An alternative to integration

In this context, integration seems like an ideal that is impossible to achieve. No refugee can give up their culture and traditions entirely and become a perfect German, Swiss or 'prototype citizen' of any of the other host nations. A pastor in Germany (a Muslim convert from Iran) suggested an alternative: "We should not seek integration but **semi-parallelism**. We should not seek to become Germans, but to live parallel with Germans, without losing our own identities. We can still visit our own doctors, eat our own food and listen to our own music, while living in harmony with the people of this nation. Integration attempts could result in fundamentalism – the fear of losing your identity results in you fighting for it."

To alleviate the fears that host nations have of losing their identity, and to address the challenges

that refugees experience in a new culture, a new approach needs to be sought. For European Christians who understand the season – that God is at work through the war in Syria, drawing millions of Muslims (who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to hear the Gospel) to flee to Europe (for a time of harvest) – the question of integration impacts the futures of both Europe and the Middle East.

When an INcontext team visited Germany in 2016, it was evident that Muslims are indeed converting to Christianity, and many are wanting to return home (to Iraq or Syria) to share their newfound faith there. And if Muslim refugees continue coming to faith in Christ through the efforts of the European Church, Christian demographics are set to shift. A new 'Christian Europe' that is less European and more Middle Eastern will have a positive influence on the Middle East, with the possibility of an exponential growth of Christianity in the region.

Refugee converts who return to the Middle East will have gained a new faith and been equipped by the European Church to carry home a new hope for the many who are still living there, trapped in disillusionment and despair. As the euphoria of the Arab Spring revolutions dissolved into wars throughout the Middle East, millions started to question their faith, their hope in Islam, and their future – this is the harvest field of the Muslim world, which is riper than ever before.

Will the Church in Europe identify the season and respond by stepping up the outreach to Muslim refugees? Will they train them, equip them and cover them as they return home? The future of Christianity in the Arab world and the Middle East hangs in the balance.

PRAY > For the Church in Europe not to miss the season of opportunity > For compassion to increase and fear to be dispelled > For the equipping of new believers to take the Gospel back to their home nations

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE



Hope for Syria calendars - all proceeds go towards supporting the 'forgotten' believers in Syria

To date, through projects as well as the sale of the calendars, a local Syrian pastor and his congregation in Damascus were able to supply **301 families** with essential food items.

Join us in supporting these families who continue to endure extreme conditions (especially with it being winter in Syria)

R120 (postage included) for sales in South Africa

R90 per calendar (postage included) for orders of 10 or more

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For more information or to place an order email donnely@incontextministries.org or visit the website