

A WORLD IN MOTION



ISSUE 192 | 12 APRIL 2018

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A planned six-week protest along the Israel-Gaza border, ahead of the 70th anniversary of Israel's founding, has resulted in fatal clashes.

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PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS CLASH AT GAZA BORDER



By *Cherolyn Amery*

Israeli troops shot dead seven Palestinian protesters and wounded at least 200 along the Israel-Gaza border on Friday [6 April], Gaza medical officials said, raising the death toll to 27 in the week-long disturbances. Large groups of youths ventured much closer to the no-go zone along the barrier, risking live fire from Israeli troops to roll burning tires and throw stones. The number of protesters on Friday was larger than in recent days, but lower than the outset of the disturbances on March 30, when 17 Palestinians were fatally shot by Israeli forces. The Israeli military estimated Friday's turnout at around 20,000. *(Reuters)*

Gaza's enduring protests

Gaza – a 365km² area that borders Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea – officially forms part of the Palestinian Authority, together with the West Bank territory. Once part of the Ottoman Empire (until 1917), it was under British and then Egyptian rule before being captured by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War. Today, it is home to about two million Palestinians.

In December 1987, the first "intifada" (uprising) against the Israeli occupation of Gaza was launched. This lasted until the 1991 Madrid Conference (Israeli-Palestinian peace talks), though some date the 'end' of the first intifada as the Oslo I Accord of 1993, which resulted in the creation of the Palestinian Authority and the granting of limited control to Palestinians in Gaza. The intifada was characterised by civil disobedience in various forms, such as stone-throwing protests, strikes and shutdowns.

Soon after the start of the first intifada, Hamas was created – an armed Palestinian branch of Egypt's

Muslim Brotherhood. Its goal was (and is) Israel's destruction and the return of Islamic rule to land that it saw as being occupied by Israel, and it established itself as a rival to the Fatah party (then led by Yassar Arafat) that headed up the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (widely recognised as the 'legitimate' representative of the Palestinian people). Hamas also actively (and violently) acted to derail the peace process between Israel and Palestine, and is viewed as a terrorist organisation by several governments.

A second intifada that lasted from 2000 to 2005 was marked by suicide bombings and armed attacks (by the Palestinians) and air strikes, demolitions, no-go zones and curfews (by the Israelis). In 2005, Israel completely fenced off Gaza, after evacuating all its troops and settlers.

In 2006, Hamas triumphed over Fatah in the Palestinian parliamentary elections, and in 2007, seized complete control of Gaza. In response, Israel and Egypt together imposed a near-total blockade of the area. Since 2008, Gaza militants led by Hamas have fought three wars against Israel, the worst of which was in 2014.

What is happening at present?

On Friday 30 March, thousands of Palestinian protestors gathered at five sites along the Israel-Gaza border at the start of the 'Great March of Return', a planned six-week protest that is intended to culminate on 15 May – the 70th anniversary of Israel's creation and the exodus of more than 700,000 Palestinians from their homes, which Palestinians refer to as the "Nakba" ("disaster" or "catastrophe"). The protest is ultimately to demand that refugees be allowed to return to their 'ancestral lands' that are within Israel's borders.

While the protests were intended to be peaceful, violence soon broke out. As expected in the Israeli-Palestinian context, reports from either side are conflicting and the exact truth about the situation is hard to come by, but it would seem that protestors were warned by the organisers to stay away from the fence, and Israeli soldiers opened fire and used tear gas when groups of protestors approached the fence. According to the Israeli military, those who

THE NUMBERS:

GAZA STRIP



65km

The length of the Israel-Gaza border



1.3 million

The number of registered Palestinian refugees in Gaza



\$355 million

The amount received by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees from the US in the 2017 fiscal year



35

The number of projectiles fired from Gaza at Israel in 2017 (almost double to previous two years combined)

NEWS HEADLINES



US President Donald Trump warned **Russia** of imminent military action in Syria over a suspected poison gas attack, declaring that missiles “will be coming” and lambasting Moscow for standing by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. His comments raised the prospect of direct conflict over Syria for the first time between the two world powers backing opposing sides in the seven-year-old civil war, which has aggravated instability across the Middle East.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman concluded a three-day visit to **France** after securing 19 draft contracts between French and Saudi companies worth more than \$18bn.



Twitter said it suspended over one million accounts for “promotion of terrorism” since 2015, claiming its efforts have begun to make the platform “an undesirable place” to call for violence. In its latest transparency report, Twitter said it suspended 274,460 accounts between July and December 2017 “for violations related to the promotion of terrorism.” Twitter has faced pressure from governments around the world to crack down on jihadists and others calling for violent attacks, while at the same time maintaining an open platform for free speech.

approached were throwing stones and firebombs. 16 Palestinians were reportedly killed, with hundreds of others wounded, and there were more fatalities a week later (Friday 6 April).

Israel believes that Hamas was (and is) using the protests as a cover to launch attacks on Israel, and says that most of the fatalities were members of Hamas. Hamas, however, says that while some of the fatalities were indeed part of their military wing, they were there to protest “side-by-side with their people”. But the Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh, pledged that the protests would result in refugees returning, and another Hamas leader threatened a mass breach of the border.

Israel’s use of “excessive force” against the protestors has been widely criticised, and the European Union and the United Nations have called for an independent inquiry. The International Criminal Court’s chief prosecutor said that Israel’s actions may constitute war crimes, but that “the use of civilian presence for the purpose of shielding military activities” (understood to refer to Hamas) could count as such as well.

While Palestinian demonstrations are nothing new, there are some who fear that this particular movement could escalate in the coming weeks. Patrick Cockburn, writing for the *Independent*, says that something might set this protest apart from others: US president Donald Trump’s decision to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to

Jerusalem, which he has recognised as the capital of Israel – a move that drew deep Palestinian anger and outrage. Additionally, Mr Trump announced this year that the US would withhold some monetary aid from Palestine, due to their unwillingness to participate in peace talks with Israel.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

When it comes to Christians determining a response to what happens in Israel, there is often a knee-jerk reaction, either supportive or critical of the Jewish nation. *INcontext* does not attempt to sway the argument for or against Israel – rather, our focus is on what the current unrest could mean in the global picture (and for mission endeavours in the region). With the complicated diplomatic ties and enemies that Israel has around the world, any unrest in that region becomes a global matter, and this makes these protests something to watch in the coming weeks.

But regardless of how one feels about Israel, the fact that people are suffering is something that should move the whole Church towards prayer – for all those in the region who do not know who Christ is to them, for all those in real physical need, and for the few believers in that place who can testify of a different path to peace and hope.

PRAY > For protest organisers to promote peace in the coming weeks > For wisdom for all leaders involved, locally and internationally > For believers in the region to be bold and courageous

WINNIE MANDELA: CONTROVERISAL STUGGLE LEADER



By **Conrad Bornman**

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, whose hallowed place in the pantheon of South Africa’s liberators was eroded by scandal... died early [on Monday 2 April] in Johannesburg. She was 81. Charming, intelligent, complex, fiery and eloquent, Ms Madikizela-Mandela (Madikizela was her surname at birth) was inevitably known to most of the world through her marriage to the revered Nelson Mandela. It was a bond that endured ambiguously: she derived a vaunted status from their shared struggle, yet she chafed at being defined by him. (*New York Times*)

Upbringing and education

Nomzamo Winfreda Zanyiwe Madikizela was born on 26 September 1936, in a remote village in the Eastern Cape (then Transkei). Her first name, Nomzamo, means “she who must endure trials.” Her family was counted as nobility among the Xhosa people, and her parents were both teachers.

Ms Madikizela studied at Shawsbury, a Methodist mission school at Qumbu, before completing a Diploma in Social Work in Johannesburg. She was offered a scholarship for further study in the United States, but chose instead to accept a position as a social worker at the Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto (she was the first qualified black woman to be employed at the hospital). Later, she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science, majoring in International Relations, at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Marriage and politics

In 1957, Oliver Tambo and his future wife, Adelaine, introduced Ms Madikizela to Nelson Mandela, a 39-year-old lawyer and ANC activist. They were married on 14 June 1958 (a second marriage for Mr Mandela). From the beginning, their marriage was challenging – Mr Mandela was involved in constant legal battles, including the famous treason trial (all the 156 defendants were eventually declared ‘not guilty’ in March 1961). In August 1962, Mr Mandela was arrested and began what would become a 27-year jail sentence.

Although Ms Madikizela-Mandela was politically active before she met Mr Mandela, it was after his imprisonment that her involvement in the South African liberation struggle intensified. She received the first of several banning orders in 1962, which restricted her to Soweto, and five years later, she was arrested in Cape Town while visiting Mr Mandela and was sentenced to one month in prison.

NEWS HEADLINES



The presidents of **Iran**, **Turkey** and **Russia** met for their second tripartite summit in under six months, aiming to speed the peace process for Syria and bolster their influence in the country. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hosted his Russian and Iranian counterparts at his presidential palace for a meeting that could have a critical bearing on developments in Syria. The three powers have backed peace talks in the Kazakh capital Astana which they argue are a parallel process to support UN-supported discussions in Geneva.



Amnesty International expressed concern that the death penalty continues to be applied in some Middle Eastern countries, as it reported a worldwide decline in executions and death sentences in 2017. For the second year in a row, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq were the top three for the number of executions in the world - along with Pakistan, they account for 84 percent of executions recorded worldwide.



Saudi Arabia will open its first new cinema in 35 years in April 2018 [and] plans to set up 350 cinemas by 2030, boosting the cinema industry to a \$1 billion market value. It has been reported that movie theatres will not be segregated by gender like most public places in the Kingdom.

In 1969, Ms Madikizela-Mandela was one of the first detainees of the notorious Terrorism Act of 1967. She was detained for 18 months at the Pretoria Central Prison (mostly in solitary confinement), before being charged under the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950. In 1970, she was found guilty in the famous "Trial of 22", but was then discharged on appeal. She was arrested and imprisoned multiple times in the following years, but after her active role in organising young people to oppose the Bantu Education Act that inspired the 1976 Soweto youth uprising, Ms Madikizela-Mandela was banished to Brandfort in the Free State (she spent nine years there and her home was bombed twice).

Controversy and turbulence

Although Ms Madikizela-Mandela's opposition to the apartheid regime earned her the title of "Mother of the Nation", her conduct became highly controversial, especially after her return to Soweto in 1985. She approved a 'vigilante' group of young people who became known as the Mandela United Football Club and who claimed to be her bodyguard, but who led something of a 'reign of terror' in Soweto. Her infamous words, "With our boxing matches and our necklaces we will free the country", referred to the practice of 'necklacing' – executing someone by placing a burning tire around their neck.

In 1991, Ms Madikizela-Mandela was convicted of her involvement in the abduction of 14-year-old Stompie Seipei, a suspected police informant who was later murdered by one of her bodyguards. Initially she was sentenced to six years in prison, but the sentencing was reduced to a fine of R15,000 on appeal.

Later years

When Mr Mandela was released from prison on 11 February 1990, Ms Madikizela-Mandela walked hand in hand with him. But the separation of nearly 30 years caused an alienation, and they divorced in 1996.

After the 1994 elections, she was appointed Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture but was fired for alleged financial mismanagement. In 1997, she was interviewed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission about her role in alleged human rights abuses, including torture and murder, but her popularity continued and she was elected to the ANC's national executive committee in 2007.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

In the wake of Ms Madikizela-Mandela's death, there was an overflow of tributes, most of which focused on her leading role in South Africa's freedom fight and the end of apartheid. However, the polarising aspect of her legacy continues, as many cannot remember her without remembering her missteps and controversies.

Ms Madikizela-Mandela spoke of how her imprisonment and physical abuse had stirred bitterness and anger within her, and this would have played a key role in shaping the development of her political attitudes and actions, especially in the later years. But in 1997, at the hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, she was prompted by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to apologise, saying "Things went horribly wrong. For that I am deeply sorry."

For many, Ms Madikizela-Mandela was a hero. For others, she fell far short of the acclaim given to her. From a Christian perspective, she stands as a reminder that human leaders make uncomfortable and awkward idols and cannot be worshipped blindly. Just like the 'great heroes' of the Bible, no leader is able to fulfil all people's hopes in their own strength – it is only the goodness and grace of God that allows those surrendered to Him to rise above weakness and flaws.

PRAY > For South African leaders to seek God's guidance in their lives and leadership > For South Africans to place their hope and faith in the Lord, rather than in human leaders

GOD IS WORKING FOR THE GOOD IN RUSSIA



By *Jeremiah Goddard, guest writer*

NOTE: The "Yarovaya law" (named after one of its creators, Irina Yarovaya) was passed in 2016 and included an increased regulation of evangelism and religious activities in non-religious settings throughout Russia. The law came into effect on 20 July 2016.

"And we know that in all things God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:28 is a verse we like to quote and remember when we are going through a personal trial or tribulation; a verse that gives us hope during times of persecution and pain; and a verse that reminds us that while bad things happen, God will use them. Jesus promised us persecution and hard times – He never promised us a perfect life, or an easy life. Yet, when I think back on the past four years of being involved in Kalmykia, Russia, I see God reminding His Church that He will cause all things to work together for His purpose. With 'post-Christian Europe' being reengaged by missionaries from China and Japan (and other traditionally 'closed' countries), and with the massive movement of refugees into

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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If you have any questions or comments relating to the articles in this publication or on the website, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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'open' countries, it seems that God is doing something strategic.

But when we look at things with our natural eyes, we miss out on the bigger picture of what God is doing – especially when it comes to leaders and nations. In 2016, Vladimir Putin signed into law a set of anti-terrorism laws that restrict the sharing of one's faith anywhere but in recognised church buildings. Furthermore, it places restrictions on missionary work (by people entering under a 'religious purpose' visa) including preaching, teaching and engaging in any activity seen to be recruiting people into a religious group. The effect of those restrictions is, however, still very much in question, as it has been left up to local authorities to interpret and enforce. Religious groups around Russia fought and protested this bill from the beginning, including the Russian Orthodox Church, which is a shocking turn of events politically – traditionally, the Orthodox Church has been in alignment with the Russian government.

Prior to this law, the ministry work that I did in Kalmykia was very 'standard' mission work: singing and passing out balloon animals in the city square, humanitarian work at local ministries, meetings in local schools and meetings in local churches. The focus of the trips was primarily evangelism together with relationship building and church support. Kalmykia, a mostly Buddhist state of Russia, was already challenging in a few regards, and after the law was passed, there was much confusion and fear among the local churches. Registered ministries that were in good standing with the Russian authorities were uncertain how the laws would be used or enforced. Would they stop all religious work except for that done by the Orthodox Church? Would the local authorities begin raiding churches to see if they are following the new laws? Everything was uncertain, and for a missionary from a country that has a tense relationship with the Russian government, it was a little scary.

More than a year later, our contacts within Russia have told us that we cannot do humanitarian work on a religious visa, or religious work on a humanitarian visa. We can no longer work in the nursing home or the home for handicapped children. Also, we cannot sing in the square or invite people back to the church for an event. The local

churches fear being targeted by the state and being shut down or de-registered. Our local ministry partners who serve the homeless in their area have begun to work with the local government for this purpose, and fear retaliation against the ministry.

With these trials, it appeared as though our ministry in Kalmykia was coming to an end, but God has shown Himself to be "causing all things to work together for those who love Him". God has shifted our ministry – where before there was an emphasis on evangelism, He has replaced it with mentoring and teaching true discipleship. He has opened doors for mediation between churches of different denominations, as well as churches where there have been disputes. God has molded the ministry in Russia to one that edifies and builds the local Church.

I have seen God move in mighty ways since these changes – maybe because we are now focusing where we should be. As a Westerner, or even as a missionary, it can be easy to adopt a 'saviour complex' – the idea that "I will go into this country and change the country for Jesus." This is such a dangerous concept, especially for short-term missionaries. After we go home, the local churches are left to 'pick up the pieces'. God is now using us to encourage and edify the pastors of the area who have toiled with little fruit for a long time, and there is greater unity in the city where we work than ever before. What an exciting time to be engaged where God is working out His ministry of reconciliation person to person, church to church, and church to community.

In 2017, I was fortunate to see God moving in mighty ways in Kalmykia like I had not seen in the previous three years. Of course, there is still a fear of the local authorities, but when God has His hand over a ministry, a church, an area or a people group, who can come against it? It is amazing to me that God can use a bill aimed at limiting religious activities to achieve His purpose and to focus His people on His strategy. I truly have witnessed God working ALL THINGS together for good.

PRAY > For all missionaries working in Russia to seek God's guidance about how to continue or adjust ministry activities > For the Russian Church to thrive and grow despite increased pressure

PUBLICATIONS



REWOLUSIE VAN DIE HART ("Revolution of the Heart")

"Revolution of the Heart" is an Afrikaans novel written by South African author Adriana Faling. It tells the story of two women whose lives become intertwined - an Egyptian Christian who converted from Islam and is trying to escape her family while holding fast to her new-found faith, and a South African women trying to come to terms with her husband's calling to serve the Persecuted Church in the Middle East. The novel takes place against the background of the true events of the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

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