

Palestinians, Israelis

had been coexisting peacefully

Their leaders have failed them



By Tim Costello

Former CEO of World Vision Australia

OPINION

From the relative comfort and safety of Australia, it has become almost unbearable to watch the news from Israel and Palestine.

Hamas will not surrender, Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu has doubled down on this opposition to a two-state solution, and so after a seven-day cease-fire and a hostage exchange, bombing, and bloodshed resumed.

There has been much suffering in the Middle East in past decades. To watch the suffering of Israelis, with approximately 1,200 killed and around 200 captives captured on October 7, and the death toll from Gaza growing every day and already surpassing 25,000 lives, it's easy to believe that peace is no longer possible and that Israelis and Palestinians cannot co-exist without violence.

But the truth is, the two-state solution is the only viable option for a lasting peaceful future without tensions always escalating to war. And what's easy to forget from our relative distance is that for so many Israeli and Palestinian people before October 7, living peacefully was a reality already in practice.

I have been to Israel and Palestine many times and seen peace in practice over and over again at a grassroots level. Yes, there is profound trauma and unforgettable experiences that both sides will carry with them throughout their lives. These experiences are not diminished, but they are not the only reality.

I have sat with the Circle of the Bereaved in Jerusalem, with Palestinian parents who have lost children killed by the Israel Defence Forces, and Israeli parents who have lost children in Hamas attacks. United in their grief, they comfort each other. In their suffering, friendships blossom.

I have seen a network of Israeli and Arab volunteers ferry Palestinians to the West Bank for urgent medical treatment. Project Rozana, of which I am a patron, is run by Jews, Christians, and Muslims to bring those in need from Gaza and the West Bank to Jewish hospitals in Israel. It recognises that the little people have no control over their political leaders' choices, the dire health needs of Palestinians, and the outstanding medical services offered in Israel's hospital system. It is peacemaking work, building grassroots contact between people

of the two states who, though they live side by side, do not know each other except through the lens of tribal political caricatures.

In Gaza, I visited projects growing flowers and strawberries that had an Israeli partner helping Palestinians export them to Europe to try to reduce Gaza's youth unemployment rate. These projects are small, yet these partnerships between Jews and Muslims gave jobs and hope.

There are so many examples of Israelis and Palestinians building bridges and uniting through what they have in common, not what they differ on. In these environments, away from politicians and strategists with their own agendas, people can simply look into each other's eyes, hear their stories, and see humanity.

It's also easy to forget that 1.7 million Palestinians live in Israel. A population of that size alone proves the two can and do peacefully coexist; it really challeng-

es the argument that peaceful coexistence is some kind of fanciful utopia that could never exist in a practical sense.

Christian leader and activist Shane Claiborne once said, "Peacemaking doesn't mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice, the act of destroying evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither flight nor fight, but the careful arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressor free."

What is desperately needed for the two-state solution to work is a long-term policy that is backed by both sides and supported by respective allied nations. That may not sound particularly impressive, but policy is so fundamentally im-

Two-state solution has failed

True democracy is Middle East's only hope



By Sarah Leah Whitson

Executive director for DAWN

OPINION

Following the catastrophic war in Gaza and Hamas' shocking October 7 attack on Israel, there is a fresh recognition that the historic status quo of Israel "managing the conflict" is no longer an option.

Regardless of its merits, and whatever chances for success it may have previously had, the death of the Oslo Peace Process in 2000 left a massive void where once there was an imaginable path toward a more just future.

But like any challenge to powerful oppression, in this case Israel's over Palestinians, just reaching the point where a viable alternative plan to the two-state solution might be seriously considered will require sufficient pressure.

There is no shortage of proposals and visions for the future of the region — two states, one state, or a confederation of some kind — of what a just and lasting resolution might look like in the region, where Israel has effective sovereignty over seven million Palestinians and seven million Israelis.

Even before the events of October 7, a growing number of Israelis were starting to see the connection between apartheid and the troubling authoritarianism of the Netanyahu cabinet. On October 7, a different realisation struck many Israelis in a tragic way: that it's simply impossible to go back to occupation, apartheid, and siege, while enjoying the relative quiet and safety they had come to expect. Combined with the uncertainty of what comes next, the realisation that change must occur creates an opportunity.

In its current format, the two-state solution model is no longer viable. Yet, the main obstacle in the US revising its position and support for Israel and the two-state solution remains: the massive resources of pro-Israel lobbying groups that support elected US officials who remain blindly allied with the Israeli cabinet.

Instead, an alternative peace plan is required. One such plan that my colleague, Michael Omer-Man, and I have been designing as part of our work with Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN) consists of ensuring both Israelis and Palestinians can determine democratically how they wish to organise their governance, ending the Israeli occupation of Gaza and its apartheid rule over Palestine, and establishing a transitional government tasked with transforming the existing regime to one based on principles of equal rights.

We call our plan "the Blueprint". The first and most important initial step for ending ongoing human rights violations, it will create the conditions where all people — Israeli, Palestinian, Bedouin, Druze, Armenian, and others — may freely decide whether the lands should be divided formally into different states, merged into a single state, or conjoined in some other configuration like the cantons of Switzerland. The Blueprint provides a detailed three-year plan for how this initial phase of transformation can take place. This includes establishing

a single civilian legal system; ending abusive military rule and emergency and counter-terrorism laws over Palestinian territories; allowing all people under Israeli rule to vote and have equal rights, representation in an interim government and freedom of movement; and the creation of a new Israeli and Palestinian security force with a new security doctrine.

Most significantly, this plan flips the long-held script that insists that Palestinian rights to equality, freedom, and self-determination must wait until representatives of two diverse blocs of people achieve a negotiated peace through a process that hasn't existed for at least a decade. This was the failed approach of the Oslo Peace Process in 2000, wasting decade after decade, bemoaning the absence of Palestinian "partners" with the legitimacy and capacity to negotiate with Israel, all while Israel and much of the international community ensured that no such partners could ever emerge.

By keeping Palestinians locked down under a ruthless military occupation, divided among increasingly isolated cantons, while expanding settlements and co-opting the Palestinian Authority with funding and military support, no legitimate elected leadership has been able to emerge.

Oslo's negotiated two-state plan denies the status of Palestinians and Israelis as individuals with rights vis-à-vis the state that governs