

Confederation

It's all relative, but 2017 was a good year, at least for the tourism sector in Palestine. In fact, statistics indicate that a record number of tourists visited Palestine this past year, and complaints were mainly about not having enough hotel rooms and buses to accommodate and transport the tourists. By Palestinian standards, 2017 was a "normal" year. But Donald John Trump simply had to be a party pooper and spoil all that! He couldn't but declare that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and order the American Embassy in Tel Aviv to be moved to Jerusalem.

Since December 6, when the infamous declaration was made, Bethlehem and other cities extinguished the lights of their Christmas trees (for a couple of days), and the festive spirit of Christmas has waned. There have been daily confrontations with the Israeli army by those protesting the American declaration, or the second Balfour declaration, as Palestinians call it. Sadly, several young Palestinians have already lost their lives, hundreds have been injured, and by the looks of it, this will continue. This is surely not a temporary outbreak as the Israelis would like to think. The decision to declare that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel is, in Palestinian eyes – indeed in Arab and Muslim eyes – more than a clear breach of international law and signed agreements; it is an insult to the Arab and Muslim world that touches and wounds deep-rooted religious and national beliefs. Possibly the most frequent comment voiced by Palestinians has been: "It's a promise made by someone to give what he does not have to someone who does not deserve it."

Realistically, though, and despite the wishes of many – if not most – Palestinians and indeed Israelis, neither side of this conflict will vanish into thin air. Cliché or not, unless justice is restored to the Palestinians, this conflict will never end, particularly if it becomes purely focused on religion. Should this happen, it will no longer be a conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, but rather one between the Judeo-evangelical "Christian" camp on one hand, and the Muslim and national secular camp on the other hand. The word "Christian" is in quotes since a good percentage of Palestinians, as Hanan Ashrawi reminded listeners in an interview with the BBC, belong to the oldest Christian tradition in the world. Monsieur Trump has stupidly pushed for this conflict to become a religious one.

I won't even pretend to know where to go from here or what can be done now, but common sense stipulates that there should be some sort of confederation between the state of Palestine and the state of Israel, each with its own identity and internal rule of law, and both to be under a national Palestinian-Israeli body that orchestrates national and international matters. Due to space restrictions, I will skip the few million details that would go with this plan!

During the past five decades, Jerusalem has not gotten the attention it deserves. So, in a convoluted way, Donald Trump's declaration has put the sensitive issue of Jerusalem on center stage. I only pray that the reality of this decision and its ramifications will help solve the problem, not make it worse. As Palestinians, we genuinely seek only justice and peace.

For all those who will celebrate Christmas in January, this is a heartfelt Merry Christmas to you and a happy, healthy, prosperous, and peaceful 2018 to all.



Sani Meo
Publisher