



King Henry VIII School Pastoral Letter Whole School Assembly on Gaza and Israel

Dr MB Cuthbert (Deputy Head/Designated Safeguarding Lead)
22 November 2023



Today, Rev Slavic and I led a whole school assembly on the conflict in Gaza and Israel. Please see my assembly below followed by Rev Slavic's prayer.

Firstly, I would like to go through the aims of this assembly:

In our Henry's community, there is a need for compassion despite the complexity of the war in Israel and Gaza. The goal of this assembly is to encourage learning about the conflict and its history from a factual standpoint. I will end this assembly with why we need to show our support, compassion, and kindness to everyone in our school community.

Aims of the Assembly:

- The need for compassion despite the complexity of the war in Israel and Gaza.
- To encourage learning about the conflict and its history from a factual standpoint.
- Why we need to show our support, compassion, and kindness to everyone in our school community.

Our job as a school is not to tell you what to think, but rather to help you understand and appreciate the British values of Democracy, Rule of Law, Respect and Tolerance, Individual Liberty, your rights and responsibilities, how to think critically and make informed opinions and choices.

One of the things that can be tempting and especially complicates the issues which I'll talk about, is the temptation to share something online from a source that you trust, without having any background knowledge.

With respect to what is happening in Israel and Gaza right now, that can be hurtful to people if we ourselves do not have a full understanding of the background to the current situation. Educating ourselves is the first step towards supporting others within our school community, families and nations in the middle of a deadly conflict.



Israel declared war on the Gaza Strip after an unprecedented attack by the armed Palestinian group Hamas on Saturday 7th October 2023. The conflict has now claimed thousands of innocent lives and displaced more than a million people.

The war that has unfolded over the past 6 weeks has its seeds in history. Please take time to do some of your own research on the History, I am only going to give you snapshot in order to explain how complicated the current situation is.



For decades, Western media outlets, academics, military experts and world leaders have described the historical Israeli-Palestinian conflict as difficult, complicated and deadlocked.



Jewish people lived in Palestine until AD70. After a failed uprising against the Roman Empire, most Jews fled to Europe and other parts of the middle east.

Before 1914, the area where Israelis and Palestinians now live had been controlled by the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was one of the mightiest and longest-lasting dynasties in world history. This Islamic-run superpower ruled large areas of the Middle East, Eastern Europe and North Africa for more than 600 years. The chief leader, known as the Sultan, was given absolute religious and political authority over his people.

Jews living in Europe and the Middle East often suffered from anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is hostility to, or prejudice against Jewish people. Their lives were made difficult, and sometimes they were driven from their homes and killed because they were Jewish.

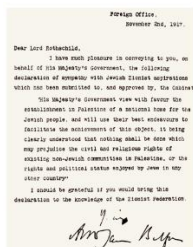
By the 1890s, some Jews were calling for a country of their own; a safe place where they could be free from persecution. Various places were considered, but to the Jews the obvious place was Palestine, the place where they and their religion had originated.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War One changed things in the Middle East. It provided an opportunity for Britain and France to expand their empires. These countries took control over parts of the area, including Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. They made deals with Arab leaders about other parts of the Middle East, including Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.



Local people in all these places, including Palestinians who lived on the land, were not consulted.

The people who lived there were mostly Arab and Muslim. A minority were Jews and Christians.



The British had control of Palestine and Jordan. They gave Jordan to the Hussein family to rule.

On November 2, 1917, Britain’s then-foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, wrote a letter addressed to Lionel Walter Rothschild, a figurehead of the British Jewish community.

The letter was short – just 67 words – but its contents had a seismic effect on Palestine that is still felt to this day.

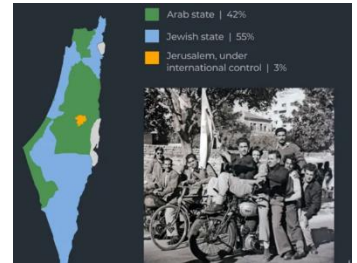
It committed the British government to “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” and to facilitating “the achievement of this object”. The letter is known as the Balfour Declaration.

Between 1918 and 1939, Jews started to emigrate to Palestine. A British Mandate was created in 1923 and lasted until 1948. During that period, the British facilitated mass Jewish immigration, many of the new residents were fleeing Nazism in Europe. Palestinians were alarmed by their country’s changing demographics and British confiscation of their lands to be handed over to Jewish settlers.

Levels of immigration increased in 1933 after Hitler came to power and anti-Semitism intensified. This caused tension between Jews and Arabs in Palestine which the British found difficult to control. They then limited Jewish immigration to Palestine in an attempt to keep the peace.

The Holocaust led to the death of 6 million Jews during World War Two. It made the case for a safe Jewish homeland impossible to deny. In 1947, the United Nations voted for Palestine to be split into two separate states: one for Jews and one for Arabs. The plan was not implemented on the ground.

In 1948, Britain withdrew from Palestine.



In May 1948, Jewish leaders declared the creation of the state of Israel. Upon declaration of the state of Israel, 5 Arab nations declared war on Israel and invaded Israeli territory.

During the war, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes. Thousands of Palestinians and Jews lost their lives. Palestinians refer to this as the Nakba, or “catastrophe” in Arabic. By the end of 1949, Israel had defeated the Arab state in multiple wars. Most Palestinian refugees were not able to go home. Some settled in Jordan, Syria and Egypt. Others settled in East Jerusalem and the **West Bank, in green**, controlled by Jordan and **Gaza in blue**, controlled by Egypt.

In 1967 there was another war between Israel and the Arab states. Israel won the war and occupied the West Bank and Gaza where many Palestinians were living. These wars left a legacy of tension which is behind the conflict between Israel and Gaza today.

There have been multiple attempts to secure peace between Israel, the Arab states and the Palestinians.

The most hopeful was known as the Oslo Accords, signed in 1993. In the Accords, the Palestinians recognised the state of Israel, and the Israelis recognised the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, known as the PLO, as the representative of the Palestinians. A new Palestinian Authority was set up to govern Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.



There was hope that a two-state solution could be reached after all.

PLO leader Yasser Arafat died in 2004. In 2005, all Israelis, including the army withdrew from Gaza.

In 2006 there were elections in Gaza, and Hamas won. Hamas expelled Fatah from the Gaza Strip, and Fatah, the main party of the Palestinian Authority, resumed control of parts of the West Bank.

Hamas do not recognise the state of Israel and are committed to its destruction. It is designated as a terrorist group by the UK and many other countries. Hamas have fought several wars against Israel since 2006.



Since withdrawing from Gaza, Israel has imposed restrictions on the population of Gaza, including strict border controls. There is a border with Egypt, which also imposes strict controls.

The population of Gaza is over 2 million. It is one of the most crowded places on earth. Conditions in Gaza are difficult at the best of times. Prospects are limited and unemployment is high. Palestinians blame Israel for their poor conditions and refer to living in Gaza as being like living in a prison.

Israel says that, due to the actions of Hamas, they need to impose restrictions to ensure their security. The events of October the 7th have led Israel to say that their population cannot be safe while Hamas rules Gaza.



Archbishop Justin Welby, Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra, a scholar and Imam from Leicester, and a former Assistant Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain, and Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, a Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism UK, and Rabbi of the New North London Synagogue stood together outside Lambeth Palace recently and delivered statements calling for solidarity and unity between communities in the UK, and rejecting any form of hatred or discrimination.

Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra said:

I stand before you in my capacity as an Imam alongside my dear friend Rabbi Jonathan. We are all deeply pained by what is happening in Palestine and Israel. We have found some comfort and a lot of hope in our friendships that have been built over many years.

We stand together to express our shared commitment to protecting the relationships between our communities. British Muslims and Jews have much in common and there are many personal ties between us. I pray for an end to this war and all wars, I pray for the innocent caught up in the carnage, I pray for the safety of everyone, wherever they are, *āmīn*.

Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg said:

We have so much in common; there are many friendships between us, and we have stood together through both peaceful and challenging days. As you say, we will sometimes have different loyalties, yet it is essential that we live together across the United Kingdom as neighbours and fellow citizens in peace and with respect.



I share your prayers for an ultimate end to war. My prayers, too, are with all the innocent people caught up in this horror, for all those who are hurt and grieve, and all who long for the safety and wellbeing of their loved ones. We are both on the side of life. We share deep concern for the welfare of everyone and pray for a better future for all.



The staff and students of King Henry VIII School have been shocked and saddened by the violence and loss of life in Israel and Gaza. A tragedy has unfolded on both sides of the border with many civilians killed, injured or kidnapped and homes ransacked or destroyed.

As citizens of Coventry, we believe in Peace and Reconciliation. The City of Coventry witnessed terrible attacks in the past and yet we live in peace now. We wish the same for the peoples of Israel and Gaza, that the fighting stops and politicians can speak with each other and find ways to live in peace.

We encourage our students to bring questions to staff and to offer support and consolation to anyone affected by this crisis. We do not encourage pupils to be politically active on this matter.

Instead, if anyone wishes to show support for one side or both we recommend a donation to the Disasters Emergency Committee or a transnational charity such as the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent.

What can I as a member of the Henry's community do?

Stand up for the values of peace and reconciliation.

Recognise that this is a politically and morally difficult situation with a complex history.

Understand that victims are more important than perpetrators. The vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians want to live peacefully. They are not responsible for the decisions of their leaders or people who claim to represent them.

Be fully informed. Call out misinformation. Check that your sources are trustworthy.

Be an upstander. Call out all discrimination including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Notice similarity, not difference.

Our school's values of RESPECT, LEARNING and WELLBEING are at the forefront of what I have said in this assembly. Right now, there are a lot of people in our school community, sitting in this hall, who are hurting deeply. Many of us don't even know who they are or even understand why they are hurting, because we might not understand the issue itself. What is most important right now is that we show our support, compassion, and kindness to one another.

Rev Slavic's Prayer

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee, says Psalm 122.

Our grief and shock only grows greater as more devastating news and images emerge from the abhorrent terrorist attacks on Israel and the abhorrent deaths of innocent civilians in Gaza, in return. Our hearts are broken when we see a rise of antisemitism in our cities. So we pray, we pray for peace.

We give thanks for our community at KHVIII where people of all religions and none, celebrate what they have in common and respect each other. We give thanks for this successful mix and celebration of cultures, remember culture day, and for the zero tolerance of bullying and racism as we saw on our last two student led assemblies.

We pray that this spirit of peace and reconciliation, the spirit of the Coventry cross of nails, will always stand against any promotion of hatred, any attempt at destroying our school culture of peace and tolerance.

And today, we pray for the people of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. For aid workers and peacekeepers. We pray for the future of the Holy Land, for those who will weep, fear and die today.

Lord God, we pray by your great mercy, defend your children from all perils and dangers. As for us, be kind to one another, tender hearted. Forgive one another as God forgave you.

Amen



Many thanks for reading our assembly,

MB Cuthbert

Dr MB Cuthbert

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KING HENRY VIII
SCHOOL

Safeguarding & Wellbeing for PUPILS/STUDENTS (2023/2024)

All students can expect the following from **KHVIII** Staff:

- Vigilance
- Information and Engagement
- Explanation
- Support
- Stability
- Understanding and action
- Respect
- Advocacy

If you are **WORRIED** or are worried about a friend, share your concerns with the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs), a trusted staff member, My Concern Boxes or use the 'I Need Help' button on the School's Intranet.

DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEADS & PUPIL WELLBEING SUPPORT



Dr Cuthbert
Deputy
Head
DSL



Mrs Cadwallader
School
Nurse
DDSL



Mr Dearden
Headmaster
DDSL



Mrs Kaczur
Assistant
Head
DDSL



Mrs Brindley
SENCo



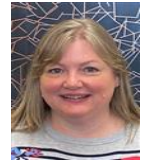
Mrs Tromans
Pupil
Wellbeing
Mentor



Mrs Dowding
Deputy
Head



Rev Slavic
School
Chaplain



Miss Rees
6th Form
Learning
Mentor



Miss Ainsworth
HoY 7



Mr Andrews
Assistant
HoY 7



Dr Coull
HoY 8



Mr Amlani
HoY 9



Mr Parker
HoY 10



Mr McKee
HoY 11



Mr Lovell
HoY L6



Mrs Tracey
HoY U6



Mr Miller
Assistant
Head
Sixth Form

Emergency Help

For when you don't think you can keep yourself safe

Call **999** if you are at immediate risk
[NHS Mental Health Crisis service](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/crisis-service): call
0300 200 0011 free 24/7 service

Young Minds: 24/7 Crisis Support
Free text to **85258**
<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

RISE: Crisis support for children and young people
Call **08081 966798 (select option 2)**

Papyrus: Confidential support and advice for young people struggling with thoughts of suicide
Call **0800 068 4141** or text **07860 039967**

Emotional Wellbeing Support

For when you need guidance or someone to listen

Young Minds: Guidance and advice for Mental health
<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Kooth: Free confidential online counselling support
<https://www.kooth.com/>

Childline: Free telephone counselling support for young people for any issue

Call free on **0800 1111**
<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

Samaritans: 24 hour confidential emotional support and guidance
Call free on **116 123**

If you are 16+ years

Healthy Mind Service (IAPT: Improving Access to Psychological Therapy): A therapeutic intervention service for people feeling anxious, low in mood and depressed. Call **02476 671090** www.covwarkpt.nhs.uk/iapt

All employed Staff who are safe to work with children wear a **BLACK** KHVIII Lanyard
All Governors who have been DBS checked wear a **BLUE** Coventry Foundation Lanyard

GREEN lanyards are worn by visitors that are allowed to be on site without supervision



PINK lanyards are worn by visitors that are NOT allowed to be on site without supervision: report to reception



