

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS FOR FREE SPEECH ON ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

We, Christians and Jews who advocate for justice for Palestinians, would like to put on record our admiration for the Dean of Lichfield, with a group of local Christians from other churches, in hosting the festival 'Holding Palestine in the Light' in Lichfield Cathedral last month, despite opposition from some quarters.

We regret the intemperate attacks to which the hosts were subjected. The language used and the opinions expressed would be rejected by many – including many Jews – in this country.

There were Jews among the members of a group from Liverpool, twinned with the West Bank village of Bil'in, who delivered an exhibition of Palestinian children's photos to Lichfield Cathedral for the festival.

The founding chair of the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community was moved to send a message of support saying: "Many Jews, including many in religious communities like ours, welcome discussions like this conference."

We find it disquieting that the Lichfield conference has been seized on by those who seek to silence criticism of Israeli policies. The Israeli government's near half century occupation, with its appropriation of Palestinian land and resources for Israeli use, and its abrogation of Palestinians' basic human rights, is conducted in direct contravention of several international laws including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

All around us there are attempts to equate criticism of Israeli government policies with antisemitism. This form of censorship seeks to halt legitimate discourse about the history and politics of Israel and Palestine.

Whether we are Christians or Jews – secular or observant – our core values are ultimately based on the Hebrew scriptures as well as the values of the Enlightenment.

" . . . let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Amos 5, v 24.

The oppression of Palestinians by a succession of Israeli governments is neither just nor righteous and it is not antisemitic to point this out, to speak truth to power. It is our duty as Jews, as Christians – indeed as citizens – to work for a just peace for all in Israel-Palestine.

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