

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
June 2019



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The four featured articles in this issue of the Middle East focus on the new election for prime minister in Israel, the discrimination by Israel of Palestinian journalists by limiting their movement, new videos showing violence by Israeli settlers that has been blamed on Palestinians, and the announcement by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) that no Palestinians will participate in a U.S.-led conference in Bahrain that the Trump administration has cast as an overture to its own plan for peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Finally, the link is provided for the latest new bulletin from Churches for Middle East Peace.

- Joseph Hinks reports in Time Magazine that a new election for prime minister will be held in Israel in September, after Netanyahu failed to form a coalition government by the 42-day deadline following his win in the April 9 election
- Abier Almasri reports for Human Rights Watch that Israel hosted the international song contest Eurovision in Tel Aviv, under the slogan of “Dare to Dream.” Many across Europe came to Israel for the festivities but, even though the writer lives less than an hour’s drive away in the Gaza Strip, she was not allowed to make the trip.
- The human rights organization B’Tselem posted videos showing settlers setting fire to fields near several villages, in some cases when soldiers watch without action, while the army also accused the Palestinians of lighting fires in the area.
- Reuters and Israel Hayom report in Israel Hayom that Palestinians will not attend a U.S.-led conference in Bahrain in June that the Trump administration has cast as an overture to its own plan for peace
- Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) offers its news bulletin for May 2019.

1) [Israel Will Hold an Election for Prime Minister in September – Even Though Netanyahu Just Won the Vote. Here’s Why](#), Joseph Hinks, Time Magazine, May 31 2019

“Just seven weeks after he claimed victory in national elections and prepared to embark on a historic fifth term, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to form a government within the allotted 42-day limit, plunging the country into political turmoil and forcing Israelis to return to the polls for fresh elections this fall.”

2) [Israel's Eurovision: 'Dare to Dream' Unless You're Caged in Gaza, Abier Almasri](#) Human Rights Watch, May 16, 2019.

"Israel hosted the international song contest Eurovision in Tel Aviv, under the slogan of "Dare to Dream." Many across Europe have come hundreds of miles to Israel for the festivities but, even though I live less than an hour's drive away in the Gaza Strip, I was not allowed to make the trip.

Israel, in coordination with Egypt, has turned Gaza into an open-air prison, caging in the two million of us Palestinians living in the small territory. For almost 12 years, Israeli authorities have largely limited travel to "exceptional humanitarian cases" – an unlawful generalized travel ban not based on any individualized assessment of security risk. The number of people travelling out of Gaza in 2018 via the Erez Crossing in was about 1 percent of what it was in September 2000, before the closure was imposed. Despite our difficult reality, I dared to dream for years of traveling and seeing the world and nearby Jerusalem, also just a short drive away. Last year, the Israeli army permitted me to leave Gaza for the first time in my life, as a 31-year-old, to attend meetings for Human Rights Watch in New York."...

"I am more fortunate than most people in Gaza, 80 percent of whom depend on humanitarian aid and more than half of whom are unemployed.

"I wish those attending Eurovision could visit me in Gaza and experience our reality, such as rolling power cuts that last most of the day, and the psychological torment of feeling trapped and unable to travel through no wrongdoing of your own."...

3) [Settlers burn Palestinian fields in Judea and Samaria](#), B'Tselem, May 22, 2019.

"On Friday, 17 May 2019, settlers torched unfarmed fields in Burin and 'Asirah al-Qibliyah. In both villages the settlers threw stones at the residents' homes. In 'Asirah al-Qibliyah, where the area is controlled by military watchtowers, a settler even fired shots in the air. Soldiers nearby did not arrest the attackers and prevented the Palestinians from approaching their burning land.

"The torched fields in Burin are situated approximately 400 meters from the village homes, and one kilometer from the settlement of Giv'at Ronen. The military prohibits Palestinians from entering these areas except on predetermined days twice a year. Even then, entry is only possible after coordination with the Israeli DCO.

"At a certain stage the settlers extinguished the fire, probably due to concern that it would spread toward the settlement. Predictably, none of the settlers who torched the area were arrested or investigated, and as always they enjoy almost full immunity. The military even blamed the Palestinians for starting fires in the area of 'Asirah al-Qibliyah. This complete backing from the state authorities is consistent with Israel's longstanding policy in the West Bank, under which such acts of violence serve its interests and help it achieve its goals."

4) ['Any Palestinian that attends Bahrain conference is a collaborator for Americans, Israel'](#)

Reuters and Israel Hayom Staff, Israel Hayom, May 21, 2019

"PLO Executive Committee member Ahmed Majdalani said: "There will be no Palestinian participation in the Manama workshop." While Israel has no problem attending the conference, Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely says Palestinians are "not genuinely interested in economic benefits."

"Palestinians will stay away from a U.S.-led conference in Bahrain next month that the Trump administration has cast as an overture to its own plan for peace between them and Israel, a Palestinian cabinet minister said on Monday.

"Washington announced the conference on Sunday, describing it as an opportunity to drum up international investment for the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Palestinians, who have boycotted the Trump administration since it recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in December 2017, have shown little interest in discussing a plan which they anticipate will fall far short of their core demands.

"Following a meeting of the Palestinian cabinet on Monday, Ahmed Majdalani, the social development minister and a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization's executive committee, said: 'There will be no Palestinian participation in the Manama workshop'"

"'Any Palestinian who would take part would be nothing but a collaborator for the Americans and Israel,' he said.

"Mohammad Shtayyeh reiterated Palestinians' aspirations for a two-state peace agreement with Israel entailing control of the West Bank and Gaza – currently run by the Islamist group Hamas – as well as east Jerusalem as their future capital. Internationally mediated talks have been stalemated for years.

"U.S. officials have predicted the Manama event will include representatives and business executives from Europe, the Middle East and Asia, as well as some finance ministers.

"The economic component discussed will constitute an announcement on the first part of the Trump peace plan, U.S. officials said.

"But Bashar Masri, a Palestinian businessman and the founder of Rawabi, the first Palestinian planned city in the West Bank, said that he had turned down an invitation to speak at the conference."...

"Gaza's ruling Hamas movement also condemned the Bahrain conference."

5) [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Bulletin for May 2019](#)