

THE DOUBLE LOCKDOWN

PALESTINE UNDER OCCUPATION AND COVID-19

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The idea to assemble a booklet on the impact of COVID-19 on Palestine was prompted by the need for information that provides an overview of the effects of COVID-19 in the realms of politics, economy, health, religion, and gender. We are delighted to present this booklet with eleven contributions by prominent public figures in Palestine.

The first section focuses on the political aspects with an opening paper by the Palestinian Chief Negotiator, Dr. Saeb Erakat, on the impact of COVID-19 on international relations and its potential impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The paper is followed by two case studies: Dr. Bernard Sabella, member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, looks at Jerusalem, a city that Israel declared united under its sovereignty. During the pandemic, however, the city is revealed to be divided into two different sets of medical and social infrastructure and services. The second case is presented by Xavier Abu Eid who examines the Israeli annexation plan promoted by President Trump that strangles the city of Bethlehem and confiscates two strategic areas west of the city: the Cremisan Valley and Makhroun.

These contributions are followed by a paper by Dr. Dalal Iriqat who examines Israeli politics during COVID-19. The arrival of the virus coincided with a third Israeli election and the forming of a new “unity government” that may have a significant impact on Palestinians.

The fifth paper, by Dr. Faisal Awartani, looks at the statistics related to COVID-19 and compares Palestine’s data with that of the rest of the world, concluding with relevant recommendations for international agencies and governments. Dr. Maher Deeb, the medical director of Saint Joseph Hospital in Jerusalem, gives a firsthand account of his experience with the pandemic.

The second section of the booklet contains five papers: The first is by Hani Abu Dayyeh, a leading figure in the Palestinian tourism industry. It

analyzes the devastating effects of the pandemic on the Palestinian tourism industry in general, particularly the city of Bethlehem, which may need two to three years to recover. The second paper, by Ms. Randa Siniara, provides a gendered perspective on violence against women. Palestinian women have been exposed to two different forms of violence, one perpetuated by the Israeli occupation and a second that originates within the Palestinian Arab patriarchal society, with the pandemic complicating domestic violence.

The third paper in this section, by Ambassador Issa Kassissieh, examines the performance of the Jerusalem churches in dealing with COVID-19, especially the pandemic measures implemented during the holiest week of Easter, and the dilemma of churches in relation to the civil authorities. A paper by Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb gives a snapshot of new forms of religious practices that have developed in response to the shutdown of churches caused by the coronavirus. He explains the short- and long-term impact that these changes might have on how religion is lived and experienced. The final paper by Dr. Varsen Aghabekian is a firsthand testimony reflecting on the intersection of politics and health by a Jerusalemite who loses a father during the pandemic and within the larger context of occupation. The fight for life, dignity, identity, and peace does not cease with death but remains a struggle carried on by one generation after the other.

We hope that these eleven papers will reveal different aspects of life in Palestine under COVID-19. This pandemic is changing both the global and local scenes in Palestine. As the world seeks an effective global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Palestinians hope for an effective international coalition to bring an end to occupation. Just as we continue our struggle to defeat the coronavirus, we will continue our work for justice, peace, and a life with dignity.

From the Foreword by Dr. Saeb Erakat and Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb