

IN MY VIEW

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MANY readers will know that I have embraced the native people of Palestine for these past 20 years.

They might also judge that as a healer, I cannot see any creature harmed wilfully. I am a universalist; I shun racial labels and look to the soul in each fellow human.

I was closing up an operation in the theatre at Torbay hospital in about 1985. Assisting me was a senior house officer who happened to be from Palestine - since 1948 called Israel.

Serving in the NHS we were privileged to serve with doctors from all over the world. So many of these young surgeons added to our knowledge, and helped in our combined inspiration.

Dr Abulafi said to me: 'Do you know what they are doing to us in Palestine Mr Halpin?'. 'I have a fair idea'. 'You have no idea, no idea.'

I did not act then. I had

so much to do as a surgeon myself. But in October 2001 I was galvanised by the bombing of civilians in Afghanistan.

Families fled to the mountains as bombs rained down from US B52s cruising at 32,000 ft.

They would freeze to death without simple shelter. The excuse for this near genocide was so called 9/11 in September 2001, the starting gun for a war on parts of the Muslim world, almost all with rich mineral wealth, especially Afghanistan.

I saw the 'unresolved conflict' in Palestine - then 53 years old at least, as the 'Hinge of Our Humanity'.

I knew of the naqba - Arabic for 'catastrophe', of the spring of 1948 when 800,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes, their land and thus their living by force of arms and by terror. Of about 20 massacres conducted by the Hagana, Lehi, Stern Gang etc, Deir Yassin stood out.

In this village close by Jerusalem, over 150 humans were killed, including dear children, and the bodies paraded.

A majority went by land or sea to Gaza - about 250,000.

The vacated villages were later razed and woods, often of alien pine, were planted in the ruins. Those Palestinian men who with some naivety returned to their villages, were shot.

Before this vast influx of distraught refugees, some dying as they fled, Gaza had a population of about 80,000. Now it is 2.3 million, and on a strip of coastal land 25 miles long and five miles wide.

Of many good friends in what was the 'land of milk and honey' there was Dr Eyad Serraj, a psychiatrist born in Gaza - just before the Second World War.

He told me that he could run in his boyhood through the woods with birds in the trees, and to the sea shore where there was the glint of fish in the clear water!

This paper reported the Voyage of the Dove and the Dolphin which my wife Sue and I lead and funded, a charity being formed soon after and £20,000 came in rapidly by donation. That voyage which started on the February 1, just four weeks later from Haldon Quay, Torquay. This was to show our common humanity with the greatly oppressed Palestinian people, and to cry against the long planned war on Iraq.