

Lifegate In February 2024

The war is now almost half a year old and we still see no breakthrough towards peace or a ceasefire. Most of the Hamas battalions in the Gaza Strip (20,000 fighters) have been routed, but the guerrilla warfare and house-to-house fighting continues unabated. The Israeli hostages are also still in Gaza, two men were freed by a special unit. Around 1.3 million Palestinian refugees are trapped in the southernmost tip of the Gaza Strip in Rafah, including many Hamas fighters. Egypt has further reinforced the border fences and barricades and wants to prevent people from fleeing from Gaza to Egypt at all costs. Drones and rockets are fired daily from Lebanon into northern Israel. Retaliatory strikes by Israel, mainly from the air, are reported from Lebanon and Syria.

While Israel's northern cities have been evacuated, isolated people are returning to the Israeli city of Sderot on the Gaza Strip in the south, many of whom have been accommodated as families in individual hotel rooms since the outbreak of the war. Officially, the people can and should also be able to return to the kibbutzes that were attacked, but for many the trauma of October 7 is very deep-seated and they are undecided. The right-wing hardliners in Netanyahu's government, who he needs for his own political survival and must therefore allow to continue, are planning the next provocative escalation.

Following Hamas' call to bring the conflict to Jerusalem and the whole of Israel during the month of Ramadan, which begins on March 9, they want to drastically restrict or even completely ban Palestinians and Israeli Arab citizens from entering the Al Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques in Jerusalem. We have already experienced the first terrorist attack near Jerusalem, which resulted in deaths and many injuries, after this was loudly announced. There is a risk that the people from the Palestinian territories and the Arab Israeli population will not remain calm and that the already tense security situation will continue to deteriorate. However, there are hardly any security forces left to look after innocent people in Israel. This could lead to a potentially explosive "showdown" between the Jewish and Arab populations.

How terrible it is when politicians risk the lives and safety of their populations for their own personal interests. The television images from the Israeli parliament with the hate speech and shouting of politicians have long since ceased to have anything to do with the reality in which the people of this country live. Many of these well-paid parliamentarians have lost all sense of respect and are destroying the people's faith in politics and their country through their devastating example.

This "community" of factions in the Netanyahu government, blackmailing each other and only held together by a shared destiny, is supposed to lead this country out of a terrible war and its deepest crisis since its creation in 1948.

We suffer, we pray, even for this democratically elected "authority", but many people in Israel are increasingly losing patience. The Palestinian head of government Mohammed Shtayyeh, who has announced his resignation, has now apparently lost his patience for his own reasons. It is not yet certain who his successor will be. Radical groups have announced days of strikes and so-called days of rage with demonstrations in the Palestinian territories around the fasting month of Ramadan. The Palestinian government security forces want to try to avoid escalations and defuse the situation.

Israel's ultra-Orthodox population still does not want to contribute to the protection of the country, while secular young people are now called up for military service immediately after graduating from high school, which has been extended by a few months to three years for young men and two years for

young women. The period of reserve conscription has been doubled (32 months until the age of 40). The Law on the convocation of the ultra-Orthodox is suspended by the government until the summer so as not to anger this group either; the religious parties are needed to ensure majorities in the governing coalition. The Israeli Supreme Court has now intervened and the government must take a stand as to why the law to convene the ultra-Orthodox population is not being implemented.

Similarly, it has been officially announced that on the night of October 6-7 (the day of the invasion of southern Israel), an unusually high level of telephone activity was detected by Israeli phone card providers in Gaza. In other words, many people were calling each other with Israeli phone cards in Gaza, coordinating the attack and securing their communications in Israeli territory. This information was dismissed by all relevant Israeli security forces, including the head of government, who was informed, that it was just "another Hamas exercise". Then, early Saturday morning, the "emergency" occurred and no one was prepared because no defensive steps had been taken.

Fortunately, our work at Lifegate brings us joy and is, above all, meaningful!

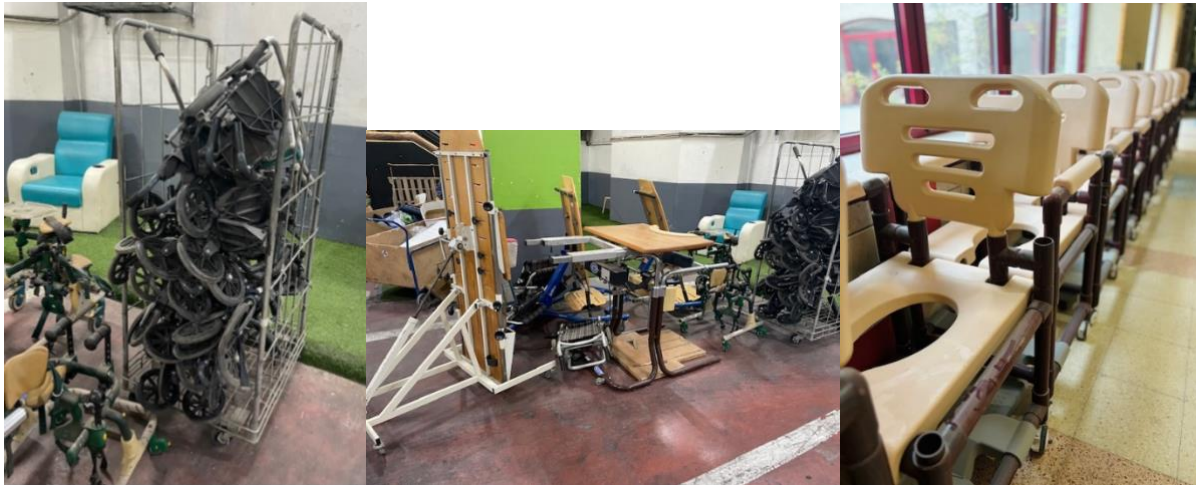
When the children come to the kindergarten in the morning, some of them poke their heads in our office doors and cheerfully say "Good morning". One autistic boy discovered my model car collection and now I have a guest every morning who wants to play with the cars.



Our young people visited the workshops of the Franciscan order in Bethlehem and got to know the work. A former Lifegate trainee found a job there and was delighted to see them again. We are happy to give orders to these workshops, which look after socially disadvantaged people, for items that we do not produce at Lifegate and we cooperate closely with them.



We received a donation in kind from the Israeli organization Yad Sarah in the form of standing frames, buggies and toilet chairs. This will enable us to provide for more Palestinian children and adults. During two home visits, our service team was able to help a young man in a wheelchair to access the bathroom and thus the toilet. In another case, we were able to take a young boy's wheelchair to our center for repair. We are pleased that word is getting around about our aid service and that more and more people are making use of our service.



We invited the mothers of our children to a very special meeting at our early intervention center. Besan, now 21 years old, a graduate and currently looking for a job, came to our women's meeting point to talk about her start in life. She started at Lifegate's support kindergarten many years ago. The attention, encouragement and educational and therapeutic support she received back then laid the foundations for her later life. Besan learned to trust herself and she went her own way. She came together with her grateful mother to pass on her life testimony to the mothers of our sponsored children and to encourage them as a living example. All the women were amazed and everyone was happy and went home with a lot of hope in their hearts for their children.



Every Friday, 20-25 children from Bethlehem and Beit Jala come to Lifegate to take part in an inclusion program with our sponsored children that we have specially tailored to this meeting. It is a joy to see how the children lose all fear of contact after just a few meetings and have a lot of fun doing activities together. The parents also give us very positive feedback: "Our children are literally waiting for Friday at Lifegate," commented one mother.



Erik Praetorius, a German special education teacher (specialist from Co-Workers) supports Lifegate's early intervention work and works here with the team from our special needs kindergarten. In an internal training program developed by him, Lifegate employees receive intensive special education support and further training from this dedicated employee, who came to us for three years and was not deterred by the war situation in the country. Erik came to the country with his wife Luise and their young son Sami and they live in Jerusalem.



Our support for families in need will continue until March and will then be extended for 6 months. 90 tasty wholemeal loaves and 50 hot meals leave the Lifegate center every day. The people are happy and grateful for this important support.



The young adults in the Lifegate laundry here during a break in our courtyard. Sporting activities are a welcome change from the daily work routine and help them to stay focused afterwards.



We are delighted that good friends of the country and our work have dared to come to us in these times and that we have received encouragement and the promise that people in Germany are praying for our work and are committed to us. An important sign for us personally and for the people entrusted to our care!



Wunderbare Stärkung durch Geschwister
im Glauben! Zu Besuch in diesen
schwierigen Zeiten von links:
Christoph Zehendner
Mitte: Klaus Göttler und Michael Sommer
Rechts: Dirk Klingelhöfer und Roland
Werner



A wonderful encouragement through our brothers and sisters in Christ” A visit in difficult times;
Christoph Zehendner Center: Klaus Göttler and Michael Sommer Right: Dirk Klingelhöfer and Roland
Werner

Abundant rainfall in February contributed to the spring flowers now blooming, the green grass sprouting in many meadows and the almond trees in full bloom. The spring time is a time of new life in nature and also encourages us humans to set out on new adventures. Unfortunately, our opportunities are very limited at the moment. The beautiful nature in the north of Israel with its many rivers and waterfalls is not accessible because of the war. Palestinian people are restricted anyway and because of the war, permits for Palestinians to come to Israel and for Israelis to enter the areas under Palestinian administration are almost impossible. So we try to enjoy a bit of where we are and above all to support the people there. The fact that we at Lifegate are able to provide the team and the children and young people with a stable and safe working and support framework on a daily basis is a sign for many people that there is a blessing in our work. As Christians, we have a hope that goes beyond our earthly life and its possibilities, and no life situation, no matter how difficult, can rob us of it. We sincerely ask our friends to continue to pray for the physical and spiritual protection of our team and the people entrusted to our care. Please also remember the financial challenges (especially due to the lack of much local income).

At Lifegate, we refuse to hate, condemn and blame the other person. We encourage people to seek peace again and again, to pursue it, the peace you make with your (supposed) enemies, and we set examples. We take responsibility for our lives and for our work and use our professionalism and our human gifts for the good of people and the glory of God every day. Palestinians and Israelis and you, our friends all over the world, help every day to ensure that our work can succeed even in these times! Thank you very much! We wish you and us a safe and blessed month of March.

Yours, Burghard Schunkert and the Lifegate team