

# We do hope

**Chris Rose** weighs the human and ecological cost in Gaza and beyond



Young boy in Gaza

Nick Welsh, Amos Trust

**A**mos Trust is a small creative human rights organisation that for 40 years has promoted the need for justice and hope. We are best known for our work in Palestine, where we deliver projects on the ground, campaign for Palestinian rights and celebrate Palestinian culture. We also have long-standing programmes calling for climate justice (based around our Latin American partners) and on creating opportunities for girls and young women whose lives revolve around the streets, with partners in Tanzania, South Africa, India and Burundi.

For many of us the last 18 months has felt like a long dark night, with the onslaught on Gaza being at the forefront of it. Whether the final death toll will be 46,000, 65,000<sup>1</sup> or 170,000 (when we include all those who have died through famine, disease and the destruction of Gaza's healthcare system), one life is one life too many, and we have all witnessed a genocide being streamed in real-time.

<sup>1</sup> [thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(24\)02678-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(24)02678-3/fulltext)

The attack has been an onslaught on every aspect of life in Gaza and the environmental costs are staggering. The UN Development Programme said Gaza needs “approximately 80 years” to restore all the fully destroyed housing. 92% of Gaza's houses have been damaged or destroyed with 82% destroyed in north Gaza. A similar situation is true with the whole of Gaza's infrastructure including hospitals, schools, mosques. 68% of Gaza agricultural land has been severely damaged or polluted; 80% to 96% of Gaza's agricultural assets have been decimated.

There are over 50 million tons of rubble – 16 times greater than the debris from all regional conflicts in the past 16 years combined. This rubble is contaminated not just with body parts and waste, but also the remains of white phosphorus, irradiated shells and unexploded ordnance. There is an estimated 37 million tons of solid waste to be cleared in Gaza and 85 per cent of water and sewage facilities are either fully or partially non-operational.

In addition to this, in November 2024, it was reported that over 85,000 tons of bombs had been dropped on Gaza since October 2023, exceeding the amount of explosives used in World War II. It is just 365 square km. It is estimated that over 7,500 tons of unexploded ordnance remain scattered across Gaza; clearing these could take up to 14 years. Meanwhile the emissions generated during the first two months of the war alone were greater than the annual carbon footprint of more than 20 of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations.

Our anger at this and frustration in watching this unfold in real-time has swept so many of us up and fuelled a massively increased level of Palestine advocacy. Our disbelief that not one, but two UK Governments can do so little to protect Palestinians while continuing to arm Israel and criminalise protestors, has left us incensed. Yet we still hope that our government will open their eyes – but it seems that they won't.

While we have rejoiced in ceasefires and ongoing prisoner exchanges, it doesn't herald a new dawn. Over the next few years, in many ways the night is going to get darker and darker. Not just in Palestine but for us all. As Trump leads the new charge to the right he seeks to destroy environmental legislation and to "fix" Ukraine, Palestine, Mexico's border, China, Canada, Greenland and so on.

## How do we respond?

Well first of all it's important to be real. Taking a deep breath

and keeping going again, and again, and again is not going to be enough – we will just hyperventilate and get even more worn out. Nor will it be enough to "hope" that things must improve to offset our despair or to repeat the mantra that *"the darkest hour is the one before the dawn"* as it keeps getting darker. Not will it be enough to strategize our way forward – even if we were all members of Mensa. Too often the strategy and the action become far too estranged.

We clearly need to stop. To breathe deeply and take our next step forward. We need to think through and develop how we will respond, in the short term and in planning for the future beyond the next four years. And we need to remind ourselves that hope is a discipline that we work on daily. But we also need to decide what we will focus on and not just get blown around by the latest headlines and the far right's desperate desire to suck out all the oxygen.

When we look for even a flicker of conscience in our politicians, it helps to recognise the shoulders on which we stand. We stand in a long line of very normal, remarkable people who have done very normal and extraordinary things. Whether it be those leaders who have inspired our activism or the person who lives next door. We need to be inspired by and to learn from them as the situations they faced felt just as extreme.

Secondly, we must be clear on what we long for. Amos Trust takes its name from the Old Testament prophet, and particularly from Martin Luther King's favourite verse, Amos



Aerial drone view of North Gaza, March 2024

Photo Credit: ImageBank4u/Shutterstock



5:24: *"Let justice roll down like waters, righteousness like a never-ending stream".*

The waters rolling down that Amos is picturing are not those of a gentle flowing river; that would have been alien to him. You only have to visit Teqoa, where Amos came from, to realise that. Teqoa is five miles southeast of Bethlehem on the West Bank. There is an Israeli settlement on one side of the dried Wadi, on the other the old Palestinian village. Yet when it rains just even a mizzle, that dried Wadi changes into a roaring river that takes out rocks and boulders and anyone stupid enough to get in its way. We are not wanting justice to flow like a meandering river but to roar through, getting rid of everything in its path. We want it to come from a never-ending spring, gushing out.

We cannot fragment our desire for a better world. I honestly don't believe we can really love anything if we don't in some way love creation and want an end to the massive injustices which dominate so many lives. Even if our campaigns must be fragmented, we must not lose sight of what we long for most. I passionately long for most pesticides to be banned. I have done remarkably little about it but am very glad that others have done a lot more. At the moment I am delighted that so many have joined the Palestine campaign, but to quote MLK, *"No one is free until we are all free"* – not just Palestine.

That does, but should not, sound daunting. One of the shoulders I am often perched on is that of North American historian and civil rights activist, Howard Zinn, who said: *"To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasise in this complex history will determine our lives."*

*If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are so many – where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.*

*And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvellous victory."*

So let's look into the darkness – and decide what we choose to focus on.



Tanzania Women's group

Photo credit: Christoph Stulz

A little over a year ago at Amos Trust we decided to focus on, not just Palestine, but also our Climate Justice projects in Central America. Along with our projects in Africa and India, we saw these as a sign of hope when Gaza was so hard. In that time our longest standing partner CEPAD<sup>2</sup> in Nicaragua, which specialised in empowering local communities (particularly women) to respond to the impact of climate change, was closed down by the Nicaraguan government. Despite operating closely with the regime for over 50 years they found themselves, together with 1,500 other NGOs, on a list of organisations ordered to cease trading. They are still trying to work out how they might respond and if they will be able to operate at all in the future.

Yet our climate fellowship, which annually supports a cohort of 12 young female climate activists in Mexico and Central America, has flourished. These young women are seeking to respond to their communities' needs in highly sexist environments against vested interests, corruption, cartels and a legislature which often cares little for the environment.

They face huge challenges and our desire to create a network of young female activists who can support one another may seem far too little. Yet, ultimately, we choose to either celebrate the light or wrap ourselves up in the darkness. There really isn't any choice. ■



Chris Rose is the Director of Amos Trust, a creative human rights organisation that promotes Palestinian rights, creates opportunities for girls and young women whose lives revolve around the streets and calls for climate justice. Chris has travelled extensively to Amos partner projects and led many trips and activities with them. He co-founded the Street Child World Cup in South Africa in 2010 and led Amos' Just Walk from London to Jerusalem in 2017.

2 CEPAD Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua [cepadnica.org](http://cepadnica.org)