

I never wanted to visit Israel nor Palestine, but when I did something changed deeply in me.

I saw injustice. I sensed fear. I felt compassion.

I saw the achievement of a 'Homeland for the Jews', but discerned great anxiety and a lack of permanent security and peace.

Because I am British, I was challenged to feel responsible for the pain and anger that the Palestinians live with.

While on holiday in Jordan, I had seen an exhibition in Aqaba of the correspondence in 1915 between Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, and Sherif Hussein, offering an independent Arab state if Arab fighters would help Britain to defeat the Ottomans during WW1.

I came home wondering how then we could have promised the same land to the Jews two years later through the Balfour Declaration.

My knowledge of history was negligible; to my shame I knew little about the Balfour Declaration, and had never heard of McMahon or Hussein. I find that most British people are like me – very ignorant of our imperial history.

Then a question struck me, 'How will Britain mark the Centenary of the Balfour Declaration?'

First I had to find out what the Declaration promised – a homeland for the Jews, provided it did not prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish inhabitants, the 90% who were Arabs.

I learnt that that it was later embedded into the British Mandate for Palestine, and that my nation had been given a 'sacred trust' to prepare both Jews and Arabs for independence in the same land.

Now the Jews have a Homeland, but the Palestinians have no independence or freedom. This is unfinished business. Is it also the seeds of the current conflict?

The Balfour Project was born in 2009 when after asking many people, 'How will Britain mark the Centenary of the Balfour Declaration?', two people responded by saying they would work with my husband and myself. Both are here today. Now we are a small but growing group of British citizens who care deeply for all the peoples of the Middle East.

Our historian colleagues have researched what led up to the short letter signed by Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour in 1917, and the differing responses to it.

We have created a web site with much information – [balfourproject.org](http://balfourproject.org) We have held conferences each year around the anniversary of the Declaration on 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

And now we are proud to present the film you will see, 'Britain in Palestine 1917 – 1948', and a 'Companion Guide' to the film, giving much more background information and references – useful in academia and the community, perhaps even in Parliament! I hope you will each accept a copy.

We showed the film recently in Jerusalem, and were recommended by Israeli friends to add Hebrew subtitles as well as the Arabic ones which we are working on.

But why have we asked to show the film here, to our elected representatives and many others who have a deep concern for Palestine and Israel?

Many people are aware of the differing Jewish and Palestinian narratives. But to make sense of the differences, we need to know a third narrative – that of Britain in Palestine. So our first aim is educational. We call on our political leaders to ensure that all citizens know our imperial history, the bad sides as well as the good, so that we can learn to make valid judgements about history and future policies.

When Sir Edward Grey, who had been Foreign Secretary in 1915, spoke in the House of Lords in 1923, he 'insisted, [that Palestine] had been "undoubtedly given to the Arabs" well in advance of the quite different priorities implicit in the [Balfour] Declaration two years later. He continued, The "best way of clearing our honour in this matter is officially to publish the whole of the engagements" and leave it to the public "to consider what is the most fair and honourable way out of the impasse". I believe that after 93 years, we should do just that! (1)

We have 18 months before the Centenary of the Balfour Declaration on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017, in which to reflect on British historical responsibility for the current impasse in Israel/ Palestine. With more education, and increasing understanding, we the electorate urge our leaders to acknowledge our history. We all have a responsibility for the way issues are now tackled.

Acknowledgement, our second aim, could give us 'clean hands', so to speak, and with honesty and transparency Britain could become trusted in a time and a region that is desperately short of trust. It could give us the chance to complete the unfinished business of 100 years ago.

The Balfour Project looks forward to a time of justice, peace and security both for Palestinians and Israelis. We believe that Britain still has a role to play – a costly one because we need to pay the price of honesty. This is a moral challenge for Britain, not a political one.