

Responding to our Global Partner Kairos Palestine

Origin: Justice, Mission and Outreach Committee, Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters

1. What is the issue?

Our Palestinian partners are calling on the United Church of Canada and other ecumenical partners to stand in solidarity with their suffering and to listen to their cries for a just peace by taking action on the requests from Kairos Palestine.

We believe that God is calling us to have ears to hear the pleas of the direct descendants of the first followers of Jesus, the Palestinian Christian community, and to respond to their requests that our denomination through study, action and advocacy help shed light on the reality of the tragedy and ongoing and deepening oppression.

2. Why is this issue important?

The United Church of Canada recognizes that, “we are not alone.” Inherent within our creed is our support for solidarity with partners in Canada and beyond. Unfortunately, as one of our Global Ecumenical partners pointedly reminded the Commissioners to GC 42 after it failed to address global partners concerns, the United Church needs the international ecumenical community. Further, the United Church has a responsibility to recognize its responsibility to stand in solidarity with global partners. (i)

We have also come to more fully understand the influence that those who hold power exercise in the media. We realize that often the cries of God’s people for justice who are marginalized are often overwhelmed by those who benefit from oppression. Jeremiah warned against those who say, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace. (Jeremiah 6:14) We believe, as followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, that there cannot be lasting peace without justice. This is evidenced in our work for justice for the First Nations people of Canada and our anti-racism work.

Further, as Rev. Dr. Munter Isaac has pointed out, our faith in North America is actually rooted in the first followers of Jesus who were Palestinian Christians. (ii)

Many who have travelled to Palestine, including over 25 Ecumenical Observers, appointed by the denomination are gravely concerned that the plight of the Palestinian people is at a critical point. The State of Israel’s adoption of the Nation State Law in 2018 legalized institutional racial discrimination in Israel and the Palestinian territories that further deprived Palestinians of their rights to life, livelihood, and a future in their homeland.

Recent acts of the U.S. administration have supported Israel’s ongoing illegal seizures of land taking and attaining control over the entire territory of Palestine. These include the 2018 move of its embassy to Jerusalem, its announcement in 2019 that the U.S. government no longer deems West Bank settlements to be “inconsistent with international law,” and the 2020 “Peace to Prosperity” plan.

Fueled by U.S. support and emboldened by the silence of the international community, the state of Israel has continued the expansion of illegal settlements. Daily, Israel continues to violate international law and the Geneva Conventions through its attacks on and control over the

Palestinian people including children.

Since the 1967 illegal occupation, successive governments of Israel have made it clear through their actions that the state has no intention of honouring their obligations as an occupying power under the Geneva Conventions. Nor do they seek to protect the rights of the Palestinian people guaranteed under the UN Human Rights Charter to dignity, self-determination, and the fundamental human rights including the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

It is time for the United Church, in light of these events, to recognize what Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu stated in an open letter to the General Council 41, “I saw the marks of apartheid in the policies of the Israeli government continued to the present day. The Palestinians are forced to live in segregated areas, often relocated to less desirable land so Jewish settlers can live in fine red ceramic-roofed houses with paved roads while most Palestinians live in squalor in villages and refugee camps. Water is diverted to settlers so that they can have nice green lawns, irrigated fields and community swimming pools while Palestinians endure shortages and dusty roads. I have looked at this and seen the ugly face of apartheid and the racism within it.” (iii) It must be noted that the situation of the Palestinians has deteriorated significantly since then.

United Church partner, Kairos Palestine, calls on churches and all followers of Jesus to take decisive action. “The very being of the church, the integrity of the Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. We declare that support for the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word or deed, is a sin. We assert that Christian support for Zionism as a theology and an ideology that legitimize the right of one people to deny the human rights of another is incompatible with the Christian faith and a grave misuse of the Bible.”

They further call upon churches, “to engage in a process of study, reflection and confession concerning the historic and systemic deprivation of the rights of the Palestinian people, and the use of the Bible by many to justify and support this oppression. We call on churches to reflect on how their own traditions can express the sacred duty to uphold the integrity of the church and the Christian faith concerning this issue. We cannot serve God while remaining silent about the oppression of the Palestinians.”

Around the globe, many other churches and ecumenical organizations have recognized that this is a time of crisis for Palestinians and have taken strong stands in solidarity with their cry of hope. This includes the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) that in 2017 affirmed “that with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, that the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake.”

Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice, a worldwide coalition born in response to the Kairos Palestine “Moment of Truth: a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering,” have asked the global churches to stand in solidarity with the proposals that are listed in the next section.

- (i) Rev. Philip Peacock, World Council of Reformed Churches, Executive Secretary for Justice and Witness

- (ii) Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac is the pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. He also serves as Academic Dean of Bethlehem Bible College. In addition, he is the director of the “Christ at the Checkpoint” conference, and is a board member of Kairos Palestine.
- (iii) The General Secretary refused to circulate the letter formally because it came in after the proposal was received. Copies of the letter were distributed to all of the table groups at GC 41.

3. How might the General Council respond to the issue?

That the 43rd General Council direct the General Secretary, General Council to respond affirmatively to the call to action by the Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, Kairos Palestine and the Global Kairos Network by implementing the call to action issued in July 2020:

- Initiate processes at all levels of the church that recognize the urgent requirement for decisive action regarding the denial of Palestinian rights and the misuse of the Bible directed toward helping United Church members better understand the injustice faced by Palestinians.
- Provide resources for study and discernment at all levels of the church and all United Church theological schools with respect to theologies and understandings of the Bible that have been used to justify the oppression of the Palestinian people. Help identify theologies that prophetically call for an inclusive vision of the land for Israelis and Palestinians, as well as Canadian First Nations, affirming that the creator God is a God of love, mercy and justice; not of discrimination and oppression.
- Affirm the Palestinians’ right to resist the occupation, dispossession, and abrogation of their fundamental rights.
- Endorse the 2005 Palestinian call for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) that provides a framework for direct political advocacy as nonviolent means to end occupation and oppression. (The purpose of BDS is not to punish or isolate Israel. It is rather to exert pressure on Israel to comply with international law, and to call upon its government and its people, in the spirit of the Word of God, to enter into the ways of justice and peace, thereby affirming its own rights as well as the rights of the Palestinian people.)
- Actively lobby the Canadian government to employ political, diplomatic and economic means to stop Israel’s violations of human rights and international law. Also, develop resources that assist denominational members to also call for justice for Palestinians with political leaders.
- Oppose anti-Semitism by working for justice against anti-Judaism, racism and xenophobia; oppose the equating of criticism of Israel’s unjust actions with anti-Semitism.
Support initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians and interfaith partnerships that combat apartheid and occupation and create opportunities to work together for a common future of mutual respect and dignity.
- Develop and publicize recommendations for tours of Palestine and Israel to help United Church members see the reality in the Holy Land with compassionate eyes for the suffering of Palestinians.

4. For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:

Are there comments, affirmations, suggestions you would like to make with respect to this proposal? Is this proposal in response to a previous proposal, motion or action? If so, please name the previous action(s) and proposal number(s).