

Proposal 2

Title: Protecting the Human Rights of Palestinian Children

Origin: Justice, Mission and Outreach Committee, Regional Council 15

What is the issue?

United Church of Canada Global Partner Kairos Palestine has called all levels of the church that recognize the urgent requirement for decisive action regarding the denial of Palestinian rights "...to actively lobby the Canadian government to employ political, diplomatic and economic means to stop Israel's violations of human rights and international law"

We believe that God is calling us in Region 15 to listen and respond to the pleas of the direct descendants of the first followers of Jesus, the Palestinian Christian community, by providing resources to raise awareness of its member churches of the need to protect Palestinian children's human rights and resources to actively lobby the Canadian government to stop Israel's violations of Palestinian children's human rights and international law.

Why is this issue important?

Children are in a central role throughout Biblical scriptures:

"Or what (parent) of you, if (your child) asks for bread will give a stone? Or if one asks for a fish, will give a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" Matthew 7:9-11

"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but Him who sent me." Mark 9:35-37

In the parable of the unjust judge, Luke 18:1-8 the "widow" represents the most oppressed and vulnerable segment of society as she persists in pleading for the judge to "grant me justice from my oppressor." It is persistence and justice that eventually bring peace to both the judge and the widow.

Love for God is inseparable from love for neighbour. Few of our neighbours are quite so vulnerable as children, who cannot fend for themselves. Children are totally dependent on adult caring and protection. Too many children's hopes and dreams for a full life have been betrayed – certainly that is true for the Palestinian children born and living under military occupation or in Israel.

".....When did we see you in prison?" Matthew 25:39

Children growing up in the Occupied Palestinian Territories live under a military occupation. Their day-to-day reality includes home and school demolitions, water rationing, the loss of family land, checkpoints and military gates, night raids, detentions and imprisonment.

Each year, between 500 to 700 Palestinian children are detained and prosecuted in Israel's military court system. Children in detention face widespread abuse: in 2013, a report by UNICEF found that the "ill-treatment of children who come in contact with the military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized throughout the process, from the moment of arrest until the child's prosecution and eventual conviction and sentencing." Amnesty International has reported that children face torture in detention, including "beatings, painful shackling and sleep deprivation."

Palestinian children also face severe risks to their health and safety. During Israel's 2014 military offensive on Gaza, 547 Palestinian children were killed, and 1,000 were left permanently disabled. Between 2018 and 2019, Israel's use of force against the Treat March of Return protests in Gaza killed 46 children, injured 8,800, and left 22,500 in need of psycho-social support. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, children report frequent harassment and violence from settlers, and are traumatized by terrifying Israeli night raids.

These children's voices and stories need to be heard to challenge our political leaders, church leaders and neighbours to grow a groundswell of care and protection for the rights of these vulnerable children.

How might Region 15 respond to the issue?

- a) Sunday November 15th has been designated "Children's Sunday", the Sunday closest to Nov. 20th when the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child was ratified in 1989. There are worship resources on the UCC website for this Sunday including about work for Palestinian children's rights. Region 15 can share worship, educational and advocacy resources with church leaders and members, encourage highlighting the need to protect the human rights of Palestinian children, and suggest they join with other churches and justice seeking organizations in actively lobbying the Canadian government "to ensure the human rights of Palestinian children are protected by instructing a Special Envoy to promote, monitor and report on the human rights situation of Palestinian children living in the occupied Palestinian Territory and Gaza." This action supports the Recommendations of the MP group that visited Palestine and Israel in 2018 and the Parliamentary petition #2667 sponsored by MP Paul Manly.
- b) In the short term the goal is to end the abuse of these children. International civil society has agreed that children aged 12-17 under detention are not to be subjected to any form of abuse. Israel has signed on to a number of international conventions regarding the treatment of children, including the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and 1984 *Convention Against Torture*. The Israeli military system in the Occupied Territories needs to adhere to the standards of these International conventions in their treatment of children.
- c) The longer term goal is to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Child detention is a key strategy of the Israel Defense Forces to maintain and deepen the Israeli occupation. It disrupts family and community life, and deters Palestinian youth from developing the capacity to provide leadership and gaining the skills for a vibrant Palestinian civil society. Ending the occupation is key to justice and equality for Palestinians. An end to Israeli occupation will end these child detention abuses.