

GCE04 JUST PEACE IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL: A CALL TO COSTLY SOLIDARITY

Origin: Executive of the General Council

1. What is the issue?

The proposal *Towards Peace in Palestine and Israel: A Call to Costly Solidarity (PMM20)*, adopted by the Executive of the 42nd General Council called for a process to review the church's policy on Palestine and Israel in light of the changing context and partner calls for solidarity. In November 2018, the Executive of the 43rd General Council of The United Church of Canada appointed a reference group of four persons to:

- undertake a review and consider current United Church of Canada policies on Palestine and Israel in light of the current reality and partner requests;
- receive perspectives from members of the United Church, partners and other relevant organizations; and
- provide advice and recommendations to the Executive of the General Council.

The Task group is offering to the church a new approach to responding to calls for justice and solidarity.

2. Why is this issue important?

The United Church has had a long history of responding to issues of injustices around the globe, and in particular to request from partners for accompaniment and solidarity. The ongoing occupation in Palestine has been a critical part of the engagement of the church. However, the context in the region has changed significantly, and the last major review of the church's policy on Palestine and Israel was done in 2012. The church currently finds itself out of step with partner calls for solidarity, the position of many of its ecumenical partners and the implications of the current reality on the ground.

There are three principal areas in which the church's policy on Palestine and Israel diverges from what partners in Palestine and Israel and the global ecumenical community are requesting: (a) whether Israel's policies and practices towards Palestinians constitute apartheid according to international law; (b) recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, and (c) adoption of economic and other measures of non-violent resistance against the Israeli occupation.

The full report of the Just Peace Task Group can be found [here](#).

3. How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitments on equity?

The task group engaged in numerous consultations in-person and online, and received written submissions (both by request and voluntarily). The Task group consulted with partners and others in the region, ecumenical partners in North America and globally, as well as members of the church.

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

The Executive of the General Council recommends to the 44th General Council:

- a) the adoption of a principles-based approach to its justice work on Palestine and Israel;
- b) the adoption of the following principles as lenses for discerning concrete actions in response to proposals from partners and councils with regard to peace building and solidarity in Palestine and Israel:

We are a church:

- i. with zero tolerance for all forms of racism, including antisemitism¹;
- ii. committed to listening to partners, and resisting the temptation to jump in as a “saviour”;
- iii. learning that listening may demand a response that invites us to costly solidarity;
- iv. seeking to speak truthfully, even when the truth is painful; with courage to name things as they are;
- v. seeking to decolonize the justice works of the church;
- vi. striving to speak and act with humility;
- vii. open to fresh revelations of historic injustices which compel us to shape and re-shape our understanding of the demands of justice;
- viii. that affirms peoples’ right to engage in non-violent resistance to injustice;
- ix. that promotes respect for and commitment to upholding international law, including political, civil, cultural, economic and social rights--including the right to self-determination;
- x. that promotes equity, mutuality, and respect as the path to right relations, in the spirit of the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- xi. that supports processes and systems that lift up those who are marginalized and oppressed;
- xii. that recognizes that in some situations there are multiple oppressions and injustices and seeks to avoid false dichotomies in our analyses and statements;
- xiii. that is accountable for how our words and actions can be misused to fuel polarizing controversies, and historical and existing injustices;
- xiv. that has a deep desire to stay in dialogue with partners and to stay in relationship even when we are in disagreement.

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

Members of the Just Peace Task Group are: Rev. Dr. Martha ter Kuile (chair), Rev. Brenna Baker, Very Rev. Jordan Cantwell, Rev. Jim Cairney, Rev. Michael Blair (until November 2020). Staff resource from the Church in Mission unit.

¹ The United Church of Canada’s Theology, Inter-church and Inter-faith Committee (TICIF) reviewed the definition of antisemitism as defined in the March 2021 Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA), and recommended that the Just Peace Task Group might consider it a helpful definition to use (<https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>)