

SW09 JUSTICE AND PEACE FOR PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

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1. What is the issue?

Kairos Palestine is a coalition of Palestinian churches and Christian organizations. It issued the *Cry for Hope* document in July 2020 in response to the ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people. *Cry for Hope* calls on Christians and churches around the world to:

- a. Begin processes at all levels that recognize the urgent requirement for action
- b. Theological study – from the point of view of colonizer and colonized
- c. Affirm the right to resist and join in nonviolent resistance, using Boycott/Divest/Sanction as a framework for exerting pressure on Israel to comply with international law
- d. Demand governments employ political, diplomatic and economic means to stop Israel's violations of human rights and international law
- e. Oppose anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, racism; work for justice
- f. Support interfaith and Israel Palestine partnerships that build mutual respect
- g. Encourage Come and See visits to Palestine, and stand with grassroots initiatives for a just peace. (*For full text, see link, below.*)

In May 2021, the world witnessed the impact of direct armed violence and indirect systemic violence on the people of Palestine and Israel. We saw the interconnectedness of suffering experienced by both peoples.

2. Why is this issue important?

In previous years the United Church of Canada has passed many resolutions and proposals. It has condemned violence in the region, and continues to do so.

Two respected human rights groups have named the actions of the Israeli government as Apartheid. In the 1970's and the 80's, Canada led the way in naming the South African state as apartheid and taking strong action to hold the government of South Africa accountable.

The Israeli Knesset (parliament), the Israeli Supreme Court, Israeli military and police forces and illegal settlers are each involved in the continual dispossession of more and more Palestinians from their lands and homes, and in removing Palestinian control over essential life resources, such as water and electricity, as well as restricting the movement of people within Palestine.

B'Tselem, a non-governmental human rights organization in Israel declared in 2020 that due to its policies regarding Palestine and Palestinians, Israel has become an apartheid state. Human Rights Watch made the same declaration in 2021. Now is the time to hold the state of Israel accountable for its persistent violations of international law including the 4th Geneva Convention.

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

As noted above, this proposal is in response to the explicit call for justice by Christians in Palestine, including United Church partners there.

As the United Church seeks to heal its own participation in settler colonialism and racism, it is time to explicitly and publicly reiterate the Church's stated position on human rights for Palestinians, and facilitate pro-rights investment decisions and other actions by all Church bodies holding funds in trust in the form of stocks. To be faithful to its understanding of the Gospel is to take and publicize action on widespread and devastating human rights offenses against Palestinians. This is consistent with our opposing discrimination of any kind on the basis of identity and our commitment to becoming an anti-racist denomination.

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

In order to stop the escalating violence affecting both Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, and to non-violently pursue peace and justice for all in the region, it is proposed that the United Church take seriously the calls to action made by our church partners in the 2020 *Cry for Hope* document and that its response include the following:

- Declare Israel to be an apartheid state.
- Advise and equip UCC Regions and communities of faith, before the end of 2023, with strategies to continue, deepen or initiate divestment action, including strong encouragement for United Church bodies holding shares as part of trust funds, to divest from those corporations located in illegal settlements or that profit from the occupation of Palestinian territory including companies that provide security apparatus that enables the oppression of all Palestinians, and;
- Immediately declare its public and explicit support of the non-violent Boycott/Divest/Sanction (BDS) movement in an effort to a) pressure the government of Israel to respect international law, and the rights of all peoples of Israel and Palestine and b) to embolden the government of Canada to take more assertive actions, within the international community, to end the occupation and respect the human rights of Palestinians.

Resources, background on Palestine & United Church policy

- *Cry for Hope* (Kairos Palestine, 2020) <https://www.cryforhope.org/>
- *Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church–Jewish Relations Today* (United Church of Canada, 1997, including the 2003 Statement on United Church–Jewish Relations Today) https://ecumenism.net/archive/docu/1997_ucc_bearing_faithful_witness.pdf