

It's Past Time

Naming Israel's Genocide in Gaza



The United Church of Christ has always been on the front end of movements for peace and justice in the US and abroad. Specifically, regarding unjust war and the violation of human rights, we, as a denomination, have never been afraid to name atrocities wherever and whenever they occur. For one compelling example, in 2015, the General Synod of the UCC passed a resolution commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, which specifically named genocide as a crime that should be "prevented, halted, acknowledged and recognized."

Inspired by and consistent with this history, the United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network recognizes and acknowledges Israel's war on Gaza as genocide. This reality requires bold action. Therefore, we call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, the release of all hostages and prisoners, an end to the blockade of Gaza, and an end to the illegal Israeli occupation of the West Bank. We further call for Palestinians to be granted the rights to self-determination and statehood, in compliance with international law.

We make this call alongside others in the United Church of Christ, including the newly formed group UCC for Ceasefire, who recently circulated a statement naming the crime of genocide which was signed by over 800 UCC members, including both clergy and lay people.

We make this call in solidarity with our Palestinian Muslim and Christian partners, who have been begging us to stand with them. Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac of the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem said, "Genocide is clear. Truth is evident for all to see... If you are not appalled by what is happening, if you are not shaken to your core, there is something wrong with your humanity. And if we, as Christians, are not outraged by this genocide... we are compromising the credibility of our Gospel message. If you fail to call this a genocide, it is on you. It is a sin and a darkness you willingly embrace."

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We make this call agreeing with our Jewish siblings who are speaking out against the war. Our friends at Jewish Voice for Peace have not been afraid to name genocide, calling the invasion of Rafah "the final stage of genocide." Raz Segal, an Israeli historian and himself a scholar of genocide, recently wrote an article in Jewish Currents calling Israel's war in Gaza "a textbook case of genocide."

We make this call knowing that it is consistent with international law. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide identifies acts that constitute genocide, many of which have been documented since October 7, 2023. To date, over 36,000 Palestinians have been killed and nearly 80,000 have been injured. Defense for Children Palestine has noted that at least 1 million children need mental health care due to the trauma they continue to endure. Israel has destroyed nearly all infrastructure that supports life in Gaza—hospitals and schools have been bombed; food, water, and medical supplies are severely lacking, and humanitarian aid distribution is practically at a standstill; and approximately one-hundred thousand housing units have been destroyed, with thousands more severely damaged and uninhabitable. Famine is already present in parts of Gaza, and it is spreading every day, leading to what famine expert Alex de Waal called "a massacre in slow motion." All of this has been done with genocidal intent, as minister of defense Yoav Galant demonstrated when he stated, "we are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly," and "we will eliminate everything."

In addition, and especially critically for us as US citizens, we make this call because our own government, the Biden Administration and Congress, are now complicit in genocide through providing Israel with diplomatic cover, financial support, and an on-going supply of deadly weapons.

It is past time for all our political and religious leaders to recognize and name the atrocity in Gaza for the genocide that it is. We therefore urge all in positions of authority and influence to answer this call immediately. Millions of lives, as well as our very humanity, are at stake.

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