

# DECLARATION FOR A JUST PEACE BETWEEN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

Approved by Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church of Christ

July 18, 2021

“The resolution draws on over fifty years of General Synod actions, statements by UCC officers, and actions by Global Ministries and its historic component bodies. It is informed by the witness of ecumenical partners, including the National Council of Churches, USA, and the World Council of Churches, and it responds to the witness of our Palestinian Christian partners, and in particular *Kairos Palestine: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love From the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* (2009) and *Kairos Palestine: Cry for Hope, A Call for Decisive Action* (2020).”

“**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that all settings of the United Church of Christ be encouraged to receive this *Declaration* as a prophetic call for renewed and continued advocacy for a just peace in Palestine and Israel and use it as a plumbline for taking action”



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1 DECLARATION FOR A JUST PEACE BETWEEN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

2  
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14  
15 SUMMARY

16  
17 The resolution calls on the General Synod to adopt a *Declaration on the Requirements for a Just*  
18 *Peace Between Palestine and Israel* articulating the principles that must be in place and honored  
19 in any future just and peaceful relationship between Israel and Palestine. The *Declaration*  
20 affirms that justice, understood both as adherence to the message of the Hebrew prophets and the  
21 life and teachings of Jesus, as well as to applicable international laws, is the fundamental and  
22 requisite principle which must guide a peaceful future for Israel and Palestine. It rejects a future  
23 imposed by military power, illegal occupation and dispossession, or unilateral annexation of land  
24 and the use of an imperialistic theology as justification. *The Declaration* pronounces Israel’s  
25 continued oppression of the Palestinian people a sin, incompatible with the Gospel. It further  
26 calls upon Local Churches, Conferences, and Associations to adopt this *Declaration* as their  
27 plumbline to guide their support for the aspirations of our partners in the region and their  
28 advocacy with the United States’ government for policies consistent with these principles.

29 The resolution draws on over fifty years of General Synod actions, statements by UCC officers,  
30 and actions by Global Ministries and its historic component bodies. It is informed by the witness  
31 of ecumenical partners, including the National Council of Churches, USA, and the World  
32 Council of Churches, and it responds to the witness of our Palestinian Christian partners, and in  
33 particular *Kairos Palestine: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love From the Heart of Palestinian*  
34 *Suffering* (2009) and *Kairos Palestine: Cry for Hope, A Call for Decisive Action* (2020).

35  
36 The *Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ* reminds us that “God calls the church to  
37 accept the cost and joy of discipleship. . . and resist the powers of evil.” The *Declaration* calls on  
38 the United Church of Christ to engage in a costly act of solidarity and accompaniment with the  
39 Palestinian people and to resist the oppressive dispossession, occupation, and economic and  
40 military oppression of Palestine.

BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL, THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

In *Kairos Palestine: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love From the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* (2009), Palestinian Christians assert that

our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land. In light of the teachings of the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political programme, but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. It was the initiation of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth” (*Kairos Palestine* par. 2.3).

The promise of God regarding land and blessing in Genesis was ultimately not about possession of land, but about the role of the people of Israel as a blessing that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12.3).

United Church of Christ biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann writes that “the Torah and the world it evokes are beyond a possessed land, and this notion links to ‘a true community of all’ that transcends any tribalism” (*Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*,” 2015, p. 37). He goes on to quote Jewish philosopher Martin Buber: “This entire history of the road from Ur of the Chaldees to Sinai is a consequence of choices and partings, events of history – tribal history and national history. But above them stands revelation [which] gives them their meaning, points out to them their goal. For the end of all these partings is a true community of all men.”

In 1987 the General Synod affirmed its recognition that God's covenant with the Jewish people has not been rescinded or abrogated by God, but remains in full force, inasmuch as “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29) – a clear rejection of Christian supersessionist theology. Along with this, however, the General Synod in 2003 rejected the theological claims of Christian Zionism which seek to privilege Jews in the modern State of Israel over others who share the land, and instead, while recognizing “the diversity of biblical perspectives on the question of a Jewish homeland,” also “affirms that all such perspectives should be grounded in the message of justice and peace taught by Jesus and the biblical prophets.” That message is summarized in the passage from Isaiah that Jesus quotes in Nazareth to inaugurate his ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isaiah 61.1-2; Luke 4.18-19). Isaiah reminds us that the mere accumulation of property at the expense of justice and righteousness offers only a barren future: “Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land” (Isaiah 5.8).

86 The United Church of Christ, through its mission agencies, has maintained a close relationship  
87 with the Palestinian Christian community, as well as the wider Arab population of Palestine. For  
88 decades it has supported churches and church-related agencies, as well as human rights,  
89 humanitarian, and social justice organizations in Palestine and Israel to the end that God’s  
90 blessings might be shared by all in the land and that the violence and oppression that have  
91 afflicted the region for over seventy years may end.

92  
93 Consistent with these understandings, the General Synod has repeatedly called for the  
94 implementation of a vision of the future for Israel and Palestine based on justice and security for  
95 all and the principle of self-determination. In 1973 the General Synod affirmed that “peace and  
96 security can be attained only through a just and stable political settlement that takes into account  
97 the legitimate aspirations of all the peoples in the area and, particularly, the right to existence of  
98 the State of Israel and the rights of the Palestinian Arabs.” In 1997 the General Synod called for  
99 a negotiated agreement on the status of Jerusalem “that respects the human and political rights of  
100 both Palestinians and Israelis, as well as the rights of the three religious communities.”

101  
102 In 2005 the General Synod called upon United Church of Christ settings and members “to use  
103 economic leverage, including, but not limited to: advocating the reallocation of US foreign aid so  
104 that the militarization of the Middle East is constrained; making positive contributions to groups  
105 and partners committed to the non-violent resolution of the conflict; challenging the practices of  
106 corporations that gain from the continuation of the conflict; and divesting from those companies  
107 that refuse to change their practices of gain from the perpetuation of violence, including the  
108 Occupation.” Further, the same Synod in a resolution on Israel’s construction of the separation  
109 barrier, called upon the Israeli government “to cease the project to construct the barrier, tear  
110 down the segments that have already been constructed, and make reparations to those who have  
111 lost homes, fields, property, and/or lives and health due to the barrier and its effects.”

112  
113 In 2015 the General Synod called on United Church of Christ settings “to divest any direct or  
114 substantive indirect holdings in companies profiting from or complicit in human rights violations  
115 arising from the occupation of the Palestinian Territories by the state of Israel” and to “boycott  
116 goods identified as produced in or using the facilities of illegal settlements located in the  
117 occupied Palestinian territories.” In 2017 the General Synod called on Israel to honor the United  
118 Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, calling attention to the practice of military  
119 detention for Palestinian children, denial of access to legal assistance, and the use of physical and  
120 emotional abuse. Most recently, in 2019 the General Synod called for advocacy for Palestinian  
121 refugees specifically as stipulated in UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (1948), and for  
122 continued US funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

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124

#### TEXT OF THE MOTION

125 **WHEREAS** for over seventy years Palestinian people have faced dispossession of their land,  
126 displacement from their homes, a harsh military occupation, severe restrictions on travel, the  
127 military detention of their children, home demolitions – over 120,000 to date and the constant

128 threat of more – and vast inequities in access to natural, economic, and medical resources when  
129 compared to that enjoyed by Israeli citizens living in illegal West Bank settlements, and also on a  
130 daily basis face severe restrictions on access to their olive groves, farms, and holy sites; [1] and

131 **WHEREAS** there are more than 5.6 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United  
132 Nations Relief and Works Administration representing a global displacement of Palestinian  
133 people dating back to 1948 whose future status remains unresolved; [2] and

134 **WHEREAS** the Israeli government has maintained an illegal military occupation of Palestinian  
135 territories since 1967 that includes the establishment of illegal Jewish-only settlements  
136 throughout the West Bank and more recently has enacted formal discrimination against its Arab  
137 citizens through the passage of the Nation State Law in 2018; [3] and

138 **WHEREAS** provocative actions under the Trump administration, including moving the U.S.  
139 embassy to Jerusalem, the suspension of humanitarian aid to the United Nations Relief and  
140 Works Administration, and support for Israel’s proposed illegal annexation of land in the  
141 occupied West Bank have further injured the Palestinian community and imposed serious road  
142 blocks to peace; [4] and

143 **WHEREAS** the Trump Administration’s Department of Education has issued a rule labeling any  
144 criticism of the State of Israel as an antisemitic act in order to suppress advocacy for Palestinian  
145 rights on university campuses, and has joined many state governments in further suppressing  
146 freedom of speech in support of Palestinian civil society’s call for boycotts, divestment, and  
147 sanctions; [5] and

148 **WHEREAS** actions by Israel, with tacit and overt support from the United States government,  
149 have established conditions comparable to those in force under Jim Crow in the United States  
150 south between Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement, with segregation laws that  
151 enshrined systematic domination and oppression by whites over blacks. Israel’s acts of  
152 domination and oppression include, but are not limited to adoption of the Nation State Law in  
153 2018, the building of the separation barrier, implementation of a restrictive pass system for  
154 Palestinians, the creation of Israeli-only highways through the West Bank, and imposed military  
155 detention of Palestinian children accused of crimes; and

156 **WHEREAS** the General Synod of the United Church of Christ and its officers have for over  
157 fifty years advocated for a negotiated process leading to a just peace between Israel and Palestine  
158 marked by adherence to international law and international standards of human rights and  
159 honoring the principle of self-determination and the rights of Palestinian refugees; [6] and

160 **WHEREAS**, reminiscent of historical examples such as the United States, Canada, Australia,  
161 and Southern Africa, Israel exhibits a current-day form of settler colonialism [7], actively  
162 engaged in the removal and erasure of the indigenous Palestinian population, through a matrix of  
163 control that includes: the imposition of a harsh military occupation; the de facto annexation of  
164 Palestinian lands and threats of further annexation; the expansion of illegal Jewish only  
165 settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank; the contraction of Palestinian-controlled land;  
166 and the restriction of travel for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza;

167 **WHEREAS** *Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action* issued by Palestinian Christian leaders  
168 and theologians in July, 2020 [8], states that “the very being of the church, the integrity of the  
169 Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. We declare that support for the  
170 oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word or deed, is  
171 a sin. We assert that Christian support for Zionism as a theology and an ideology that legitimize  
172 the right of one people to deny the human rights of another is incompatible with the Christian  
173 faith and a grave misuse of the Bible”;

174 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Third General Synod of the United Church  
175 of Christ adopts the following *Declaration*:

176 *1. We affirm* that the continued oppression of the Palestinian people remains, after more  
177 than five decades of oppression of the Palestinian people, a matter of theological urgency  
178 and represents a sin in violation of the message of the biblical prophets and the Gospel,  
179 and that all efforts to defend or legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people,  
180 whether passive or active, through silence, word, or deed by the Christian community,  
181 represent a fundamental denial of the Gospel.

182 *Therefore, we reject* the notion that Israel’s occupation of Palestine is a purely  
183 political problem outside the concern of the church or that the oppression of the  
184 Palestinian people is an inevitable consequence of global or regional geopolitical  
185 interests.

186 *2. We affirm* that the biblical narrative beginning with creation and extending through the  
187 calling of the Israelites, the corrective admonitions of the prophets, the incarnation and  
188 ministry of Jesus and the witness of the apostles to the “ends of the earth” . . . speaks of  
189 God's blessing extending to “all the families of the earth.” (Genesis 12.3)

190 *Therefore, we reject* any theology or ideology including Christian Zionism,  
191 Supercessionism, antisemitism or anti-Islam bias that would privilege or exclude  
192 any one nation, race, culture, or religion within God’s universal economy of grace.

193 *3. We affirm* that all people living in Palestine and Israel are created in the image of God  
194 and that this bestows ultimate dignity and sacredness to all;

195 *Therefore, we reject* any laws and legal procedures which are used by one race or  
196 religion or political entity to enshrine one people in a privileged legal position at the  
197 expense of another, including Israel’s apartheid system of laws and legal procedures.

198 *4. We affirm* that all peoples have the right to self-determination and to their aspirations for  
199 sovereignty and statehood in the shaping of their corporate religious, cultural, and political  
200 life, free from manipulation or pressure from outside powers, and that a just resolution of  
201 conflicting claims is only achieved through the equal protection of civil rights, the fair and  
202 just sharing of land and resources, and peaceful negotiation based on international law and  
203 UN resolutions.

204 *Therefore, we reject* the use of Scripture to claim a divine right to the land as the  
205 rationale for Israel’s illegal seizure and annexation of Palestinian land as well as the  
206 imposition of so-called peace agreements by Israel or the United States through the  
207 exercise of political and military domination that leaves Palestinians without equal  
208 rights, full citizenship, and the opportunity to thrive religiously, culturally,  
209 politically, and economically.

210 5. *We affirm* the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes if they so choose or  
211 to be compensated for their loss of property, consistent with UN General Assembly  
212 resolution 194 (1948).

213 *Therefore, we reject* the denial of this right, just as we reject efforts to manipulate  
214 internationally-agreed upon definitions of refugees to attempt to erase this right  
215 which extends across generations.

216 6. *We affirm* the First Amendment constitutional right to freedom of speech and assembly  
217 to protest the actions of the State of Israel and to uphold the rights of Palestinians,  
218 including the use of economic measures to support justice as a First Amendment right and  
219 joining the international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement by individuals,  
220 institutions, corporations, and religious bodies that advocate peace with justice or  
221 participate in any aspect of the use of economic measures to support justice.

222 *Therefore, we reject* the idea that any criticism of policies of the State of Israel is  
223 inherently antisemitic, in confession that some criticism is antisemitic in intent or  
224 impact, and we oppose the efforts of U.S. federal and state governments to limit free  
225 speech on university campuses and to restrict or ban support of the international  
226 Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement.

227 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that national setting of the United Church of Christ send the  
228 text of this *Declaration* to Local Churches, Associations and Conferences; and

229 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that all settings of the United Church of Christ be encouraged  
230 to receive this *Declaration* as a prophetic call for renewed and continued advocacy for a just  
231 peace in Palestine and Israel and use it as a plumbline for taking action, including, for example:

232 a. Committing to hearing the voices of Palestinians regarding their situation, including the  
233 voices of Palestinian Christians through the study of Palestine Liberation Theology,  
234 attention to statements and appeals such as *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth* (2009)  
235 and a *Cry for Hope* (2020), participation in travel seminars that expose visitors to the  
236 Palestinian community, and use of resources from Global Ministries of the United Church  
237 of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

238 b. Implementing the calls of prior General Synod resolutions, including the 2015  
239 Resolution, “A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions Toward a Just Peace  
240 in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” and the 2017 Resolution, “A Call for the United

241 Church of Christ to Advocate for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Military  
242 Occupation.”

243 c. Examining critically our use and interpretations of Scripture as well as liturgies and  
244 hymns that equate ancient Biblical Israel with the modern state in ways that promote  
245 settler colonialism and the dispossession of Palestinian land, rights, and cultural  
246 expressions.

247 d. Offering support and encouragement to college students and faculty members as well as  
248 the human rights groups (including Students for Justice in Palestine, Jewish Voice for  
249 Peace, American Muslims for Palestine, and many other allied groups), whose freedom to  
250 speak, witness and advocate on university campuses is threatened in any way by state or  
251 local governments, or by college administrators.

252 e. Advocating for the cessation of U.S. military aid to Israel until such time that Palestinian  
253 human rights, civil rights, and self-determination are fully realized and protected in  
254 compliance with international law, US laws on foreign military assistance, and the  
255 principles of human rights.

256 f. Supporting the full restoration of US funding for the United Nations Relief and Works  
257 Agency which carries out critical services by and for Palestinian refugees, and  
258 encouraging continued support for UCC partners which serve Palestinian refugees.

259 g. Demanding that the plight of Palestinian refugees be addressed by Israel and the  
260 international community based on United Nations Resolution 194 guaranteeing that  
261 “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should  
262 be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid  
263 for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property  
264 which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the  
265 Governments or authorities responsible.”

266 **FUNDING:** The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance  
267 with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

268 **IMPLEMENTATION:** The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries  
269 or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.  
270

271 *Footnotes*

272 (1) Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions: <https://icahd.org/>

273 (2) United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East:  
274 <https://www.unrwa.org/>

275 (3) [https://www.vox.com/world/2018/7/31/17623978/israel-jewish-nation-state-law-bill-  
276 explained-apartheid-netanyahu-democracy](https://www.vox.com/world/2018/7/31/17623978/israel-jewish-nation-state-law-bill-explained-apartheid-netanyahu-democracy)

277 (4) [https://www.globalministries.org/ecumenical\\_statement\\_on\\_current\\_u\\_s\\_policy\\_and\\_isra  
278 el\\_palestine](https://www.globalministries.org/ecumenical_statement_on_current_u_s_policy_and_israel_palestine)

- 279 [https://www.globalministries.org/ucc\\_disciples\\_leaders\\_issue\\_joint\\_statement\\_in\\_respon](https://www.globalministries.org/ucc_disciples_leaders_issue_joint_statement_in_respon)  
280 [se to the peace and prosperity proposal](https://www.globalministries.org/ucc_disciples_leaders_issue_joint_statement_in_respon)  
281 [https://www.globalministries.org/not\\_peace\\_but\\_apartheid\\_b\\_tselem\\_s\\_brief\\_response\\_t](https://www.globalministries.org/not_peace_but_apartheid_b_tselem_s_brief_response_t)  
282 [o the trump plan](https://www.globalministries.org/not_peace_but_apartheid_b_tselem_s_brief_response_t)  
283 [https://www.globalministries.org/ucc\\_disciples\\_leaders\\_issue\\_statement\\_on\\_israeli\\_settl](https://www.globalministries.org/ucc_disciples_leaders_issue_statement_on_israeli_settl)  
284 [ements](https://www.globalministries.org/ucc_disciples_leaders_issue_statement_on_israeli_settl)
- (5) [https://forward.com/fast-forward/410044/trump-education-dept-adopts-controversial-](https://forward.com/fast-forward/410044/trump-education-dept-adopts-controversial-new-definition-of-anti-semitism/)  
285 [new-definition-of-anti-semitism/](https://forward.com/fast-forward/410044/trump-education-dept-adopts-controversial-new-definition-of-anti-semitism/)  
286 [https://palestinelegal.org/news/2018/9/11/kenneth-marcus-adopts-controversial-](https://palestinelegal.org/news/2018/9/11/kenneth-marcus-adopts-controversial-antisemitism-definition-at-doe-with-no-public-notice-reopens-dismissed-rutgers-case-from-2014?rq=anti-semitism%20department%20of%20education)  
287 [antisemitism-definition-at-doe-with-no-public-notice-reopens-dismissed-rutgers-case-](https://palestinelegal.org/news/2018/9/11/kenneth-marcus-adopts-controversial-antisemitism-definition-at-doe-with-no-public-notice-reopens-dismissed-rutgers-case-from-2014?rq=anti-semitism%20department%20of%20education)  
288 [from-2014?rq=anti-semitism%20department%20of%20education](https://palestinelegal.org/news/2018/9/11/kenneth-marcus-adopts-controversial-antisemitism-definition-at-doe-with-no-public-notice-reopens-dismissed-rutgers-case-from-2014?rq=anti-semitism%20department%20of%20education)  
289
- (6) [https://www.globalministries.org/mee\\_resolutions](https://www.globalministries.org/mee_resolutions)  
290
- (7) [https://www.wrmea.org/israel/palestine/how-settler-colonialism-can-help-us-understand-](https://www.wrmea.org/israel/palestine/how-settler-colonialism-can-help-us-understand-israel-and-the-us.html)  
291 [israel-and-the-us.html](https://www.wrmea.org/israel/palestine/how-settler-colonialism-can-help-us-understand-israel-and-the-us.html)  
292
- [https://www.globalministries.org/ameu\\_s\\_the\\_link\\_the\\_decolonizing\\_of\\_palestine\\_toward](https://www.globalministries.org/ameu_s_the_link_the_decolonizing_of_palestine_towards_a_one_state_solution_by_jeff_halper)  
293 [s a one state solution by jeff halper](https://www.globalministries.org/ameu_s_the_link_the_decolonizing_of_palestine_towards_a_one_state_solution_by_jeff_halper)  
294
- (8) Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice: <https://www.cryforhope.org/>  
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**Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about the  
[DECLARATION FOR A JUST PEACE BETWEEN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL](#):  
A Resolution of Witness offered for approval by General Synod 33  
Of the United Church of Christ**

*Many of the questions below, along with more in-depth background and information for congregations, are addressed in greater detail in "[Endorse and Affirm](#)," a video resource you are invited to download and use in your own church.*

**Why is this Declaration important now? The UCC has spoken on Palestine and Israel previously, including at previous General Synods; what is new in this statement?**

This Declaration seeks to speak to our church about Palestinian suffering in theological language and with political awareness. Two major documents produced in the past decade by our partners in Palestinian churches call upon Christians everywhere to support a peaceful struggle for justice for Palestinians: Kairos Palestine, "[A Moment of Truth: A word of faith and hope from the heart of Palestinian suffering](#)" (2009); and Kairos Palestine, "[Cry for Hope: A Call to Decisive Action](#)" (2020). The 2020 call appeals anew for "decisive action on a matter that we believe relates to the integrity of our Christian faith." The document names the occupation of Palestine as sin; it describes the occupation as an apartheid system. The proposed Declaration joins in these understandings. To do so is both a theological statement (calling the occupation a sin) and a political reality (the Israeli occupation meets international standards that define an apartheid system).

Again joining our Palestinian partners, the Declaration notes recent developments in United States policy, e.g.: moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; cancelling longstanding policy of opposition to illegal Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank, among others; as well as noting recent political realities in Israel, such as passage of the Israeli Nation State Law which grants full rights of Israeli citizenship only to Jews. The Declaration names Christian Zionism as incompatible with the Gospel, reaffirms the rights of Palestinian refugees, and refuses to allow legitimate activism in support of Palestinian human rights to be defined on college campuses as anti-Semitic hate speech.

At this critical moment the Declaration's objective is to widen recognition of how the situation has deteriorated for Palestinians over the past four years, and build commitment to doing the work of bringing a new era of positive change into being with new American leadership.

**What is the UCC's history with Palestine and Palestinians? What are our relationships with Palestinian Christians and their churches and institutions?**

The UCC has more than 200 years of engagement in the Middle East through its historical mission agencies, starting in the early 19th century. The United Church of Christ has been directly involved in ecumenical support for Palestinian rights, especially Palestinian refugees, dating back to the mid-1960s. The first resolution of the UCC's General Synod was adopted within weeks of the 1967 war, supporting a "permanent peace in the Middle East" and the "just treatment for the Arab refugees and relief of their suffering." Since its establishment 25 years ago, Global Ministries, the common mission agency of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), has been responsible for nurturing global mission partnerships for the UCC. Those partners include a wide range of churches and organizations in Palestine/Israel and the Middle East, among them church denominations, ecumenical councils and agencies, human rights advocacy organizations, and others. [A description of these can be found here.](#) The UCC, with the Disciples, has also appointed mission personnel to serve with these partners over the years.

**How does the Declaration comport with the biblical history of the Jewish people and their relationship to the land that is now Israel?**

The Bible records and interprets human experiences with the divine, and how those experiences shaped an understanding of who God is and what God expects of, and desires for, God's people. It is not a scientific document or an impartial record of history. Many theologians understand God's covenant with the ancient people of Israel as one of *righteousness*: the people committed themselves to obey God's moral and ethical commandments, and God promised to be with them and care for them as they sought to live out that commitment. Some Old Testament texts specifically refer to God's gift of a land to God's people; others do not; still others call into question the concept of God's people as a nation with a land. The contemporary concept of nation-state as we know it today was absent from the worldview of Biblical times. Modern believers look at the behavior of states through the lens of their faith and what it requires of them, and may be moved to call states to account for behavior that is perceived as unethical and sinful. Among many other sources and scholars, our distinguished UCC Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann offers a succinct, readable treatment of this issue in his book [Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict](#). This new "[Reflection Guide for Proposed GS Resolution on Palestine and Israel](#)," a resource prepared especially for congregational study of this Declaration, may be downloaded [here](#). Another Bible study resource for use by congregations may be downloaded [here](#).

**Is this Declaration taking a political stance, and is that appropriate for a church body?**

The United Church of Christ (along with many other denominations and religious bodies) has a long history of addressing national and international affairs as a part of its witness for justice for all peoples, and has called out many violations of human rights both in the U.S. and abroad. The Declaration continues the UCC's commitment to supporting non-violent means for movement toward a just peace that can be embraced by both Israelis and Palestinians. It is a recognition that the occupation, the expansion of colonial settlements, the devastating blockade imposed on Gaza, and the violation of human rights and international law represent violent oppression of the Palestinian people in their own land. International law permits violent resistance to unjust occupation, but this Declaration offers a vision of just peacemaking that provides a meaningful alternative to violent resistance.

Jesus taught and practiced liberation for the oppressed as an essential element of faith. Consequently, a witness for just treatment for oppressed people is a Gospel mandate. The Declaration acknowledges that implementing such a faith commitment may compel difficult choices in the political and social realm, and recognizes that changes in the interest of justice for Palestinians will have political implications for the State of Israel and its people, as well as for U.S. policy.

**What does the Declaration say or imply about our church's relationships with Jews and Jewish partners in interfaith endeavors? Can we continue to work cooperatively with American Jews and their organizations if we approve this Declaration?**

Jewish opinion regarding Israel is not monolithic. Historically, many major Jewish figures have criticized Zionism and Israel, including [Rabbi Elmer Berger](#); [Hannah Arendt](#), [Albert Einstein](#); [Yehudi Menuhin](#); Martin Buber, Judah Magnus, Brant Rosen. Likewise, American Jews today have varying attitudes toward Israel, and toward criticism of the Jewish State. Furthermore, Jewish colleagues hold many concerns for social justice and public welfare in common with those of other faiths. Our responsibility as Christians is to be as open as possible to cooperation wherever we see that interfaith work can effectively address common problems and issues. The Declaration in no way prejudices cooperation with Jews or Jewish groups in tackling problems that are shared by people of many faiths. In fact, such cooperation may open opportunities for greater understanding and communication about matters that cause us disagreement.

**Is this Declaration anti-Semitic? Many countries experience terrible human rights violations - aren't we picking on Israel unfairly?**

The American organization, [Jewish Voice for Peace](#), states: "Criticism of Jews for being Jews is anti-Semitic; criticism of the state of Israel is not." Given that Christianity bears a long history of anti-Semitic belief and behavior toward Jews - which the Declaration condemns -- it is important to be very clear about that distinction.

Witness to injustice against Palestinians is a critique of unjust policies and human rights violations practiced by the State of Israel, not of Israelis or Jews. [Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa](#) has been passionate in his comparison of former South African apartheid with the occupation of Palestine, and his support for the nonviolent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Former Israeli Knesset (parliament) member and government minister [Shulamit Aloni](#), warned publicly in 2003 that if Israel's treatment of Palestinians is "not yet genocide," it is certainly murderous and criminal.

[B'tselem](#), a leading Israeli human rights organization founded and led mostly by Jews, has recently issued an extensive report defining Israeli policy toward Palestinians as apartheid, defending its definition with detailed research and description. A 2020 article in the American Jewish publication [Tikkun Olam](#) [critiques the conflation of Judaism with Zionism](#).

The Declaration affirms the right of people of all faiths and backgrounds to live in peace and safety, free of discrimination and danger, with equal protection of law, and to freely practice their faith and express their culture. The Declaration critiques the behavior and practices of the State of Israel for violating the human rights of the Palestinians whose historic territory it occupies. Israel as a modern nation-state is to be subject to the same scrutiny of its behavior with regard to human rights as any country in the world, and is to be expected to adhere to agreements of international law (e.g., the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Hague Convention, which define responsibilities of occupying powers) to which it is itself a party.

Perhaps most importantly for U.S. Christians, the Declaration calls out the United States for its strong support for the tools of the occupation (Israel receives more U.S. tax dollars *per capita* in military aid than any other country in the world), as well as national, state and local legislative efforts in the U.S. to criminalize as "hate speech" any public criticism of Israel. U.S. policy helps to keep the occupation in place; it is up to U.S. believers to prayerfully call that policy into question.

## [Synod delegates approve resolution decrying oppression of Palestinian people](#)

by [Tiffany Vail](#) | published on Jul 19, 2021

The United Church of Christ [“Special Edition” General Synod](#) on Sunday evening approved a resolution decrying oppression of Palestinian people as a matter of faith, but not before a debate over whether calling that oppression “apartheid” and naming it a “sin” was too inflammatory.

### ***Synod delegates approve resolution by 83% of the vote.***

The committee that considered the resolution had recommended delegates approve an amended version that softened the tone of what had [originally been presented by six churches](#). But delegates reversed two of three major changes the committee made before approving the resolution by a vote of 462 to 78, with 18 abstentions.

The committee’s chair, the Rev. Elliot Munn of the [Vermont Conference](#), said there was strong consensus in favor of the resolution, except around those particular words.

“Some folks wanted to maintain the initial language of the resolution, which offered an unambiguous prophetic vision. Others were more cautious about how particular words would affect their interfaith friends and colleagues,” he said.

The committee had “struck language identifying the oppression of Palestinians as a sin, and struck language that identified Israel as an apartheid state,” he said. The committee also changed a call to eliminate all aid from the United States to Israel, instead calling to eliminate “military aid” only, a revision that stayed in the final version.

Rev. David Grishaw-Jones of the [New Hampshire Conference](#) argued that labeling the current oppressive system of government in Israel as apartheid was critical.

“Apartheid is an internationally defined and recognized term used in legal systems and international diplomacy to name situations like the current one in Palestine and Israel,” he said. “The word is profoundly important to our covenant partners in Palestine and Israel who struggle against the yoke of occupation and oppression every day.

“It is our Palestinian partners out of their own lived experiences of dispossession and apartheid who called upon us to name what they have already experienced and continue to experience every day,” he said.

The Rev. Jeff Lukens of the [Southern New England Conference](#) served on that committee and had advocated for softening the language.

“The intention of removing the word ‘apartheid’ was to pay attention to our very real interfaith relationships we have here in the United States on the ground,” he said. “While the global impact of this resolution is very little, it might damage our interfaith relationships that

we have. Toning down the inflammatory use of the word apartheid will help us to speak to the truth of what is happening and allow us to continue to be faithful in our interfaith work.”

The resolution, called “[Declaration for a Just Peace between Palestine and Israel](#),” is written in a confessional format and was inspired by a plea from Palestinian Christians, called “[Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action](#).” It asked churches worldwide to join in declaring “that support for the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word or deed, is a sin.”

Some delegates balked at the word “sin” in the first “Be It Resolved” line of the document, which said “We affirm that the continued oppression of the Palestinian people remains, after more than five decades of oppression of the Palestinian people, a matter of theological urgency and represents a **sin in** violation of the message of the biblical prophets and the Gospel.” The committee had removed “sin in.” Delegates put it back in.

The Rev. Shari Prestemon, UCC Board member and Conference minister in [Minnesota](#), made the motion to return the word to the statement. “Grounding this declaration in theological terms is essential,” she said. “What we speak of is not just a geopolitical matter. We speak as church, where our sacred scriptures and theological language must always inform and shape us. The systemic oppression and denial of human and civil rights for Palestinians caused by the policies of the state of Israel violate the vision of just relationships set forth by ancient prophets and the gospels. They can rightly be described as a sin against God and God’s children.”

The Rev. Guy Johnson, a delegate from Ministers for Racial, Social and Economic Justice, asked “if this is not a sin, then what is?”

“I understand it might make some of our interfaith partners a little uncomfortable, but I believe we are called to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable,” he said. “And right now those who are in positions of power in Israel seem to be a little comfortable making sure their Palestinian siblings are kept in an apartheid state.”

The resolution explicitly rejects the idea that speaking against the Israeli government – as opposed to Jewish people – is anti-Semitic. It affirms that all people have a right to self-determination, and that “a just resolution of conflicting claims is only achieved through the equal protection of civil rights, the fair and just sharing of land and resources, and peaceful negotiation based on international law and U.N. resolutions.”

In an implementation conversation that took place on Friday, proponents of the resolution presented various steps that could be taken by individuals, congregations, associations, conferences and the national setting. They included such things as studying this resolution, recommitting to previous resolutions on the topic, supporting those in the secular world trying to speak out on the topic, and advocating for the cessation of U.S. military aid to Israel.

*Tiffany Vail, director of media and communications for the Southern New England Conference, United Church of Christ, is a General Synod Newsroom volunteer.*

<https://www.ucc.org/synod-delegates-approve-resolution-declaring-oppression-of-palestinian-people/>



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# An open letter from Kairos Palestine to United Church of Christ

July 22, 2021

**Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President**

**United Church of Christ**

Dear Rev. Dorhauer,

The board and staff of Kairos Palestine are delighted and encouraged to learn of the United Church of Christ's overwhelming passage of the [resolution](#), "Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel," at its Thirty-third General Synod.

It's more than a sign of solidarity. We receive the Synod's vote as a bold act of faith and conscience, precedent-setting among denominations in North America.

Over many years and through many resolutions and actions, the United Church of Christ has stood with Palestinians in our struggle for a just and lasting peace. We're grateful for the resolution's reference to Kairos Palestine's *A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* and Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice's *Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action*. Perhaps others will be encouraged to read our plea – grounded in faith, hope and love – and be moved to join us in our nonviolent



As we have said to our Jewish neighbors in *A Moment of Truth*, "Even though we have fought one another in the recent past and still struggle today, we are able to love and live together. We can organize our political life, with all its complexity according to the logic of love and its power, after ending the occupation and establishing justice."

We know that many people worked long and hard to create the resolution, to distribute it for endorsement by others, to inform and educate others, and to see it through to its passage at the Synod. Please convey our gratitude to them and your many congregations.

Sincerely,

+ Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah

Rifat Kassis

Kairos Palestine Chair  
General Coordinator

Kairos Palestine



## **CRY FOR HOPE: A CALL TO DECISIVE ACTION**

### ***WE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND THE OPPRESSION OF THE PALESTINIANS***

**Public launch: 1st July 2020**

We, 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,” issue this urgent call to Christians, churches and ecumenical institutions. We do this together with committed Christians in Palestine and around the world. **This is a call for decisive action** on a matter that we believe relates to the integrity of our Christian faith.

We have arrived at a critical point in the struggle to end the oppression of the Palestinian people. The State of Israel’s adoption of the Nation State Law in 2018 legalized institutional discrimination in Israel and the Palestinian territories, officially depriving 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 project 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 ineffectual response of the international community, Israel’s newly-formed coalition government has cleared the way for outright annexation of around one third of the occupied West Bank, including the Jordan Valley. These developments make it all the more clear that we have come to the end of the illusion that Israel and the world powers intend to honor and defend the rights of the Palestinian people to dignity, self-determination, and the fundamental human rights guaranteed under international law, including the right of return for Palestinian refugees. It is time for the international community, in light of these events, to recognize Israel as an apartheid state in terms of international law.

In affirming this reality, we realize that it is incumbent upon us as 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.

**We call upon all Christians and on churches** at congregational, denominational, national, and global ecumenical levels 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.

As we face this *kairos*, we are mindful of the legacy of faith and action of those who have come before us and have faced circumstances of urgency and crisis. In 1933 German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared that the Nazi regime's denial of the rights of Jews and the interference of the state into matters of religion placed the church in *status confessionis*. The Barmen Declaration of 1934 reinforced the church's obligation to stand up to injustice and to unequivocally oppose ideologies of tyranny. In 1964 the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Willem Visser 't Hooft, stated that racism, like apartheid, constitutes a *status confessionis* for the churches. The WCC followed this word with action in 1969 in implementing its courageous and far-reaching Program to Combat Racism. In 1977 the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) declared that "apartheid created a *status confessionis* for the church" and in 1984 suspended the white Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa who practiced apartheid. In 1982 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declared apartheid incompatible with Christian belief, and suspended the member churches practicing racial separation. The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) 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" and directed the General Secretary to initiate six direct action steps. Since 2009, Kairos documents from ecumenical organizations from around the world have appeared in response to the Kairos "Moment of Truth" document of the Palestinian Christians, pledging action and providing theological affirmation of this prophetic call by the Palestinian churches.

**The present times call for actions as bold, as faithful, and as resolute.** The time for decision has arrived. "We call out as Christians and as Palestinians to our Christian brothers and sisters in the churches around the world" reads the 2009 Kairos Palestine document. Eight years later, in 2017, in the Open Letter to the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement, the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine wrote: "Things are beyond urgent. We are on the verge of a catastrophic collapse. This is no time for shallow diplomacy, Christians!" Now, three years later, this is a cry for hope to our brothers and sisters throughout the world. We invite our fellow Christians, their local congregations, churches and international ecumenical organizations, to receive and respond to our common witness, to join the process of confessing, and to initiate processes to formally reject the oppression of the Palestinian people and any use of the Bible to justify this injustice by committing to the following actions:

- **Initiate processes** at local, denominational and ecumenical levels that recognize the present kairos and the urgent requirement for decisive action regarding the denial of Palestinian rights and the misuse of the Bible. These actions will express the unity of the church in its commitment to stand up to injustice wherever it is to be found.
- **Engage in study** and discernment with respect to theologies and understandings of the Bible that have been used to justify the oppression of the Palestinian people. Offer theologies that prophetically call for an inclusive vision of the land for Israelis and Palestinians, 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, and join the Palestinians in their creative and nonviolent resistance. The 2005 Palestinian call for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) provides a framework for economic, cultural, and academic measures and 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.

- **Demand** also that governments and world bodies employ political, diplomatic and economic means to stop Israel’s violations of human rights and international law.
- **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.
- **Come and see** the reality in the Holy Land with compassionate eyes for the suffering of Palestinians, and stand in solidarity with grassroots initiatives on the part of all faiths and secular groups who challenge the occupation and who work for a just peace.

We make this call out of concern for the future of both peoples. In the words of Kairos Palestine, our call is rooted in the *logic of love* that seeks to liberate both the oppressor and oppressed in order to create a new society for all the people of the land. We continue to hold firm to the hope articulated in the Kairos document that Palestinians and Israelis have a common future -- that “we can organize our political life, with all its complexity, according to the logic of love and its power, after ending the occupation and establishing justice.” As followers of Jesus, our response to ideologies of exclusivity and apartheid is to uphold a vision of inclusivity and equality for all peoples of the land and to persistently struggle to bring this about.

We acknowledge that by our commitment as Christians to the liberation of the Palestinian people we stand against the theology of Empire, a global order of domination manifesting in racial, economic, cultural, and ecological oppression that threatens humanity and all of creation. In making this confession, we embrace our membership in the community of the broken bread, the church fulfilling its mission to bring the good news of God’s gift of love, mercy, compassion, and abundant life for all.

*H.B. Michel Sabbah*

*Rifat Kassis*

**H.B. Michel Sabbah**

Patriarch Emeritus: Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem  
President: Kairos Palestine

**Rifat Kassis**

General Coordinator: Global Kairos  
for Justice

# UCC General Resolutions on Israel/Palestine

- [1967 General Synod Resolution: On the Middle East Situation](#)
- [1969 General Synod Resolution: On the Middle East situation](#)
- [1971 General Synod Resolution: The Middle East](#)
- [1973 Executive Council Resolution: Middle East Situation](#)
- [1979 General Synod Action: Communication to Presidents Sadat, Begin, and Carter](#)
- [1979 General Synod Resolution: Overture on Consultation on the Future of the City of Jerusalem](#)
- [1987 General Synod Resolution: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#)
- [1989 General Synod Resolution: On the Middle East](#)
- [1991 General Synod Resolution: Consequences of the Persian Gulf War for a Just Peace Church](#)
- [1991 General Synod Resolution: Support for the Men and Women of our Armed Forces](#)
- [1993 General Synod Resolution: Urging Reopening of East Jerusalem](#)
- [1997 General Synod Resolution: Jerusalem City of Life](#)
- [1997 General Synod Resolution: Palestine/Israel](#)
- [1999 General Synod Resolution: Bringing Justice and Peace to The Middle East](#)
- [2003 General Synod Resolution: An Alternative Voice to Christian Zionism](#)
- [2005 General Synod Resolution: Concerning Use of Economic Leverage in Promoting Peace in the Middle East](#)
- [2005 General Synod Resolution: Tear Down the Wall](#)
- [2007 Executive Council action on referred resolution "In Support of a Renewed and Balanced Study and Response to the Conflict Between Palestine and Israel"](#)
- [2013 Executive Council action on reports of implementation of 2005 "Economic Leverage" resolution](#)
- [2015 General Synod Resolution: A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions Toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#)
- [2017 General Synod Resolution: A Call for the United Church of Christ to Advocate for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation](#)
- [2019 General Synod Resolution: Addressing the State of Global Forced Migration](#) [including rights of Palestinian refugees]
- [2021 General Synod Resolution: Declaration for a Just Peace between Palestine and Israel](#)