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United Methodist General Conference Calls on Israel to End Unjust Practices Toward Palestinians

May 20, 2016 – Despite fierce opposition, which included calls to delegates from Israeli ambassadors and consulates, the United Methodist General Conference passed strong measures calling for an end to Israel’s unjust practices toward Palestinians.

One of these measures, Resolution 60206, calls on Israel to correct the unequal distribution of water in the West Bank, where illegal Israeli settlers receive four times as much water as the indigenous Palestinians. It also demands that Israel recognize existing titles to land owned by Palestinians within the West Bank.

Another measure passed by the conference, Resolution 60843, calls for accountability from the Israeli government for the destruction of land and life. It urges US officials to contact the Israeli government to halt the expansion of illegal settlements and confiscation of Palestinian land.

A third measure, Resolution 60868, calls for a church-wide Task Force led by key agencies to review and research actions that respond to the requests by church missionaries and Palestinian Christians. All United Methodist missionaries who have served in the Holy Land and thousands of Palestinian Christians have asked the church to cut its financial ties to the occupation.

Resolution 60206 reflected concern that Israeli settlers have access to four times as much water as Palestinians, though the major aquifer is located beneath Palestinian land. This allocation of water according to ethnicity is a violation of United Methodist principles and international law. Throughout the West Bank, Palestinian land is being surrounded and confiscated for Israeli settlements, which the church opposes. Orchards and homes are being destroyed.

Resolution 60843 focused on the Palestinian village of Wadi Foquin, where the UMC has a partnership with the village. Church members traveling to Wadi Foquin have seen the human rights abuses villagers suffer, including raw sewage running from the large illegal settlement of Beitar Illit onto the village farmland below it. In 2014, the Israeli government declared over 1,000 acres of private land belonging to Wadi Foquin and neighboring Palestinian villages to be “state land,” in violation of international law. In June 2015, the Israeli army accompanied bulldozers that destroyed 1300 fruit trees belonging to farmers in the village. The Israeli government also issued a stop work order for construction of a soccer field funded by United Methodist donations through the church’s Board of Global Ministries.

The task force created by Resolution 60868 was established in recognition of the growing movement within the church working for Palestinian human rights. The rationale included in that measure referenced Resolution 6111 from the last General Conference in 2012 that called on all nations to ban the import of goods and services coming from illegal settlements. In addition to the boycott action, the church's pension board excluded five Israeli banks from investment this past December, divesting from two of the banks and one Israeli construction company.

Rev. Michael Yoshii, Co-chair of the advocacy group United Methodist Kairos Response (UMKR), said, "We were humbled by the widespread support for Palestinians, especially among indigenous people and ethnic caucuses within the church. Bishop John Yambasu of Sierra Leone delivered a powerful sermon during the conference calling for justice for the Palestinian people."

A UMKR event during the conference featured three Bishops, including the President of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, who called for the use of decisive action by the church to cut its ties to the occupation. Japanese Americans, Filipino Lumad natives, Africans and the head of the Native American International Caucus were among those highlighting the parallels between the Palestinian plight today and the ethnic cleansing of other indigenous peoples.

Rev. Yoshii also noted the strong interfaith support for UMKR and its efforts in Portland, saying, "We are grateful for the chance to work with such dedicated people in this continued quest for justice as we seek to answer the Palestinians' call for freedom."

United Methodist Kairos Response is a global grassroots group within the United Methodist Church seeking to respond to the urgent call of Palestinian Christians for actions that can end the Israeli occupation of their land. For more information, visit www.kairosresponse.org.

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