

Dear Fellow United Church Members

The United Church's 41st General Council this summer, will be discussing whether and how to respond to the requests from leaders of Palestinian churches outlined in the Kairos Palestine Document (KPD). The KPD eloquently describes the long-standing and worsening conditions faced by Palestinians living under the illegal Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The KPD urgently calls on churches worldwide to come to the aid of Palestinians. It says that doing nothing is not an option and asks for the following responses to the call to action:

- A call to repentance; to revisit fundamentalist theological positions that support certain unjust political options with regard to the Palestinian people.
- We say to the Churches: Come and see. We will fulfill our role to make known to you the truth of our reality, receiving you as pilgrims coming to us to pray, carrying a message of peace, love and reconciliation. You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike.
- Condemn all forms of racism, whether religious or ethnic, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and we call on you to condemn it and oppose it in all its manifestations. At the same time we call on you to say a word of truth and to take a position of truth with regard to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land.
- Call on individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation

The United Church of Canada has always tried to respond to the calls of our partners. This commitment is reflected in the Principles of Partnership, which include mutuality, and accountability, shared decision-making, dialogue, joint advocacy, and shared vision, among others. As we continue to live into the commitments of global partnership in the United Church, it is time to respond to our partners in Palestine.

We are an informal network of United Church people who support a non-violent solution to the Israeli occupation and a just peace in Israel/Palestine. We encourage you to respond to this call from our Christian Palestinian partners by voting for, and encouraging the commissioners who represent you to vote for resolutions to respond positively to their call to repent for our complicity, to come and see the realities in Palestine, to condemn racism, and to support Boycott Divestment and Sanctions as a non-violent form of resistance to the Israeli occupation.

We appreciate the courageous initiatives of the United Church since 1997 to redress anti-Semitism, (that is, the promotion of prejudice and discrimination against Jews and Judaism). The KPD criticisms of the Israeli state are not anti-Semitic. In fact the KPD condemns "all forms of racism, whether religious or ethnic, including anti-Semitism" (p.23) and it respectfully appeals to Jewish (and Muslim) religious leaders to recognize our mutual obligation to "defend the oppressed" and to "rise up above the political positions that have failed so far." (p.34)

The 2003 United Church policy document *Bearing Faithful Witness* pointed out,

As a modern nation-state, Israel, like all other nation-states, is subject to the moral ambiguities of power, which by definition, is never innocent and never can be innocent. Even if Israel is conceived in religious and theological terms, as, for example, a land promised by God to the Jewish people, this fact remains true. Indeed, the faith component makes criticism even more necessary because of the dangers of self-righteousness inherent in any religious nationalism. ... Legitimate criticism [of Israel] concerns itself with specific policies and actions on the part of Israeli leaders and governments as well as the enduring problems and tensions of Israeli society. Legitimate criticism is always able to distinguish between a regime and a people...
Bearing Faithful Witness, p.13

We understand that those who support the KPD calls for action have been attacked as “anti-Semitic” and threatened with “ruining the United Church’s relationship with our Jewish brothers and sisters”. To this we say: Don’t be afraid! It is a moral imperative to oppose the unjust and unethical behavior of any nation-state, including Israel. Criticizing, condemning, and taking action against the policies of an occupation that is perpetrated by the Israeli state is not anti-Semitic. The United Nations and World Court have ruled repeatedly that the Israeli occupation of Palestine is illegal. Jewish scholars also argue that the occupation undermines the moral legitimacy of Israel and damages Judaism itself.¹ Many Jewish organizations in Canada and internationally, including Independent Jewish Voices, Jews for a Just Peace, Jewish Voice for Peace, and Rabbis for Human Rights, whole-heartedly support the KPD’s call to churches to take a stand on the side of a just peace in Israel/Palestine.

We encourage you to check out the attached voting guide which outlines how and why you can support motions regarding this issue at the General Council 41. We invite you to dialogue with us about how you can support this important work. Please check out our educational resources and as well as through the Kairos Palestine Study Guide which is available through the United Church Resource Distribution (UCRD) service. Please work together with us to support a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Sincerely,

United Network for a Just Peace in Palestine/Israel, GC Advocacy Team.
unitednetworkpalestineisrael@gmail.com

¹ . Marc H. Ellis (2009) *Judaism does not equal Israel*. (N.Y.: The New Press); Gersom Gorenberg (2011) *The unmaking of Israel*. (NY:HarperCollins);