GA-2339

COMPELLED TO WITNESS: ANSWERING THE CRY OF OUR PALESTINIAN SIBLINGS

(Sense-of-the-Assembly)

WHEREAS the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada sent its first missionary to Palestine in 1851 and, through more than a dozen Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) mission partners in Israel and Palestine, Disciples have worked alongside the people there with appointed mission workers and financial support; and

WHEREAS the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has a history of commitment to racial, economic and social justice; and has spoken clearly and participated actively in movements for civil rights and anti-racism in the US and Canada and for human rights and the just resolution of conflict around the world; and between 1973 and 2019, our General Assembly has articulated clear positions in support of justice and peace for Palestinians and Israelis1; and

WHEREAS the establishment of the State of Israel led to the 75-year displacement and dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes and property—amounting to a modern-day form of settler colonialism and creating a refugee population that now numbers more than 7 million2; and the State of Israel has imposed a harsh 56-years-long occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and

WHEREAS globally recognized human rights organizations—including B’Tselem-The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International—and the United Nations' Special Rapporteur have issued detailed reports3 describing the State of Israel’s apartheid system; and

WHEREAS in February 2022, Disciples leaders issued a Pastoral Letter, Compelled to Witness: Affirming Justice, Rights, and Accountability in Promoting Peace in Israel/Palestine4, naming actions and circumstances that have led to the deterioration of hope for a just peace in Israel/Palestine, and finding that “Israeli policies and practices that discriminate against Palestinians—Christian and Muslims alike—are consistent with the international legal definition of the crime of apartheid as defined in the International

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1 Disciples General Assembly resolutions related the Middle East: https://www.globalministries.org/mee_resolutions/
2 https://www.anera.org/blog/who-are-palestinian-refugees/
4 https://www.globalministries.org/compelled-to-witness/
Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (ICSPCA, 1973) and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2002); and

WHEREAS a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine must be grounded in the message of Scripture, both in the Hebrew prophets and the life and teachings of Jesus, as well as international law and globally recognized human rights conventions; and

WHEREAS in December 2009, our mission partner Kairos Palestine issued A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian Suffering, a profoundly theological document grounded in the Biblical texts, which declares:

…We believe 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 (KP 2.3); and

WHEREAS Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action, issued in July 2020 by Palestinian Christian leaders and theologians, states that “the very being of the church, the integrity of the Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake,” and “support for the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word or deed, is a sin”; and

WHEREAS in 2022, Kairos Palestine published A Dossier on Israeli Apartheid: A Pressing Call to Churches Around the World, a resource that: points to the conditions necessary to establish the crime of apartheid; offers a Biblical/theological reflection that describes the sin of apartheid; reminds readers that “The church has named and resisted the sin and injustice of apartheid in the past”; and repeats the Palestinians’ cry,

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5 According to the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (ICSPCA, 1973), the international legal definition of apartheid is, “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them.”

6 Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC, 2002) defines the crime of apartheid as “inhumane acts ... committed in the context of an institutionalised regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.”

7 E.g. Isaiah 61:1-2; Isaiah 5:8; Micah 6:8; Amos 5:23; Hosea 2:21; Luke 4:18-19,


9 https://www.cryforhope.org/media/attachments/2020/06/30/cry-for-hope-english.pdf

“Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love?”;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, July 29-August 1, 2023:

- Embraces an understanding that the Bible’s narrative—beginning with creation and extending through the calling of the Israelites, the prophets’ witness, the ministry of Jesus, the witness of the apostles, and Revelation’s vision of a new heaven and a new earth and the Tree of Life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations—speaks of God’s blessing extending to “all the families of the earth (Genesis 12.3)”; and
- Believes that all people living in Palestine and Israel are created in the image of God deserving of equal dignity and their human rights; and
- Affirms the 2022 Disciples leadership Pastoral Letter, *Compelled to Witness: Affirming Justice, Rights, and Accountability in Promoting Peace in Israel/Palestine*; and
- Asserts that the continued oppression of the Palestinian people is a matter of theological urgency and represents a sin in violation of the message of the Biblical prophets and the Gospel, and that all efforts to defend or legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people represent a fundamental denial of the Gospel; and
- Rejects any theology or ideology including Christian Zionism, supercessionism, antisemitism or anti-Islam bias that would privilege or exclude any one nation, race, culture, or religion; and
- Condemns speech and acts of antisemitism, and rejects the notion that criticism of policies of the State of Israel is inherently antisemitic; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the General Assembly:

- Affirms that many of the laws, policies and practices of the State of Israel meet the definition of apartheid as defined in international law, documented in the reports cited above, and described as such by some of our mission partners over the past two decades, and affirmed in our Disciples leaders’ pastoral letter, *Compelled to Witness*; and
- Affirms that all peoples have the right to self-determination and to their aspirations for full and equal citizenship in the shaping of their corporate religious, cultural, and political life, and that a just resolution of conflicting claims is only achieved through the equal protection of civil and human rights, the fair and just sharing of land and resources, and peaceful negotiation based on international law and UN resolutions; and
- Calls for an end to Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories consistent with international law and UN resolutions; and
• Affirms the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes if they so choose or to be compensated for their loss of property, consistent with UN General Assembly resolution 194; and

• Insists on the U.S. constitutional right to freedom of speech and assembly to protest the laws, policies and practices of the State of Israel and to support the rights of Palestinians, including the use of economic measures by individuals, institutions, corporations and religious bodies that advocate for lasting peace with justice11; and

FINALLY, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that congregations, regions, general units and related institutions and organizations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) be encouraged to:

• Listen to the voices of Palestinians, with special attention to statements such as Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth (2009) and Cry for Hope (2020), and;

• Participate in travel opportunities that expose pilgrims to the Palestinian community; and

• Make use of resources from Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ12; and

• Use this resolution to guide their support for the aspirations of our denominational partners in the region and in our advocacy with the governments of the United States and Canada consistent with the call in Compelled to Witness.

Heart of the Rockies Christian Church, Fort Collins, CO
Division of Overseas Ministries
United Christian Church, California, PA
Disciples Peace Fellowship
Tapestry Church, Bargersville, IN
Harbor Christian Church, Newport Beach, CA

BACKGROUND

Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands at a distance;
for truth stumbles in the public square,
and uprightness cannot enter,
Truth is lacking…

The LORD saw it, and it displeased him

11 https://www.globalministries.org/employing_economic_measures/
12 https://www.globalministries.org/resource/mee_resources_index/
that there was no justice.
He saw that there was no one,
and was appalled that there was no one to intervene...”
Isaiah 59:14-16

This resolution is a response to the cries of our Palestinian mission partners and the
February 2022 Pastoral Letter—Compelled to Witness: Affirming Justice, Rights, and
Accountability in Promoting Peace in Israel/Palestine—issued by our denomination’s
three church officers authorized to speak on behalf of the Disciples. At its March 31,
2022 meeting, the Board of Directors of the Division of Overseas Ministries of the
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) affirmed and endorsed the “Compelled to
Witness” pastoral letter, and urged robust education, advocacy, and engagement of the
matters raised in the letter, through Global Ministries.

The resolution affirms the Disciples’ past stands for justice and, referencing reports from
globally recognized human rights organizations, calls on the General Assembly to
declare that, through its laws, policies and practices governing the lives of Palestinians,
Israel has established an apartheid system which is a contradiction to the message of
the Hebrew prophets and the life and teachings of Jesus as well as international law
and globally recognized human rights conventions.

Further, the resolution explicitly condemns speech and acts of antisemitism, rejects any
interpretations of Scripture that use the Bible to elevate the rights of one people, Jews,
over another, Palestinians, and calls on the three manifestations of our church to use
this resolution to guide their support for the aspirations of our denomination’s mission
partners in the region and in our advocacy with the governments of the United States
and Canada consistent with these principles.

Most recently, our mission partner Kairos Palestine published A Dossier on Israeli
Apartheid: A Pressing Call to Churches Around the World. The dossier clearly defines
apartheid according to international law and offers a Biblical/theological reflection
describing the sin of apartheid. Also included are summaries of and links to reports from
widely recognized human rights organizations citing Israeli apartheid, and statements
made by churches, faith groups, and international leaders (including prominent Israeli
Jews).

The General Board recommends that the General Assembly ADOPT GA-2339.
(Discussion Time: 12 minutes)

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13 https://www.globalministries.org/compelled-to-witness/