

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Third General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

DECLARATION FOR A JUST PEACE BETWEEN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by

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With the concurrence of:

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1 SUMMARY

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

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

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23 The *Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ* reminds us that "God calls the church to
24 accept the cost and joy of discipleship. . . and resist the powers of evil." The *Declaration* calls on
25 the United Church of Christ to engage in a costly act of solidarity and accompaniment with the
26 Palestinian people and to resist the oppressive dispossession, occupation, and economic and
27 military oppression of Palestine.

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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).

The United Church of Christ, through its mission agencies, has maintained a close relationship with the Palestinian Christian community, as well as the wider Arab population of Palestine. For decades it has supported churches and church-related agencies, as well as human rights,

74 humanitarian, and social justice organizations in Palestine and Israel to the end that God’s
75 blessings might be shared by all in the land and that the violence and oppression that have
76 afflicted the region for over seventy years may end.

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

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

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

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109 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

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111 **WHEREAS** for over seventy years Palestinian people have faced dispossession of their land,
112 displacement from their homes, a harsh military occupation, severe restrictions on travel, the
113 military detention of their children, home demolitions – over 120,000 to date and the constant
114 threat of more – and vast inequities in access to natural, economic, and medical resources when
115 compared to that enjoyed by Israeli citizens living in illegal West Bank settlements, and also on a
116 daily basis face severe restrictions on access to their olive groves, farms, and holy sites¹; and
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118 **WHEREAS** there are more than 5.6 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United
119 Nations Relief and Works Administration representing a global displacement of Palestinian
120 people dating back to 1948 whose future status remains unresolved²; and
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122 **WHEREAS** the Israeli government has maintained an illegal military occupation of Palestinian
123 territories since 1967 that includes the establishment of illegal Jewish-only settlements
124 throughout the West Bank and more recently has enacted formal discrimination against its Arab
125 citizens through the passage of the Nation State Law in 2018³; and
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127 **WHEREAS** provocative actions under the Trump administration, including moving the U.S.
128 embassy to Jerusalem, the suspension of humanitarian aid to the United Nations Relief and
129 Works Administration, and support for Israel’s proposed illegal annexation of land in the
130 occupied West Bank have further injured the Palestinian community and imposed serious road
131 blocks to peace⁴; and
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133 **WHEREAS** the Trump Administration’s Department of Education has issued a rule labeling any
134 criticism of the State of Israel as an antisemitic act in order to suppress advocacy for Palestinian
135 rights on university campuses, and has joined many state governments in further suppressing
136 freedom of speech in support of Palestinian civil society’s call for boycotts, divestment, and
137 sanctions⁵; and
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139 **WHEREAS** actions by Israel, with tacit and overt support from the United States government,
140 have established conditions comparable to those in force under Jim Crow in the United States
141 south between Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement, with segregation laws that
142 enshrined systematic domination and oppression by whites over blacks. Israel’s acts of
143 domination and oppression include, but are not limited to adoption of the Nation State Law in
144 2018, the building of the separation barrier, implementation of a restrictive pass system for
145 Palestinians, the creation of Israeli-only highways through the West Bank, and imposed military
146 detention of Palestinian children accused of crimes; and
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148 **WHEREAS** the General Synod of the United Church of Christ and its officers have for over
149 fifty years advocated for a negotiated process leading to a just peace between Israel and Palestine
150 marked by adherence to international law and international standards of human rights and
151 honoring the principle of self-determination and the rights of Palestinian refugees⁶; and
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153 **WHEREAS**, reminiscent of historical examples such as the United States, Canada, Australia,
154 and Southern Africa, Israel exhibits a current-day form of settler colonialism⁷, actively engaged
155 in the removal and erasure of the indigenous Palestinian population, through a matrix of control
156 that includes: the imposition of a harsh military occupation; the de facto annexation of
157 Palestinian lands and threats of further annexation; the expansion of illegal Jewish only
158 settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank; the contraction of Palestinian-controlled land;
159 and the restriction of travel for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.
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161 **WHEREAS** *Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action* issued by Palestinian Christian leaders
162 and theologians in July, 2020⁸, states that “the very being of the church, the integrity of the
163 Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. We declare that support for the

164 oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word or deed, is
165 a sin. We assert that Christian support for Zionism as a theology and an ideology that legitimize
166 the right of one people to deny the human rights of another is incompatible with the Christian
167 faith and a grave misuse of the Bible”;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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206 *Therefore, we reject* the use of Scripture to claim a divine right to the land as the rationale
207 for Israel’s illegal seizure and annexation of Palestinian land as well as the imposition of
208 so-called peace agreements by Israel or the United States through the exercise of political

209 and military domination that leaves Palestinians without equal rights, full citizenship, and
210 the opportunity to thrive religiously, culturally, politically, and economically.

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

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

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

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227 *Therefore, we reject* the idea that any criticism of policies of the State of Israel is
228 inherently antisemitic, and we oppose the efforts of U.S. federal and state governments to
229 limit free speech on university campuses and to restrict or ban support of the international
230 Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement.

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

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

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239 a. Committing to hearing the voices of Palestinians regarding their situation, including the
240 voices of Palestinian Christians through the study of Palestine Liberation Theology,
241 attention to statements and appeals such as *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth* (2009)
242 and a *Cry for Hope* (2020), participation in travel seminars that expose visitors to the
243 Palestinian community, and use of resources from Global Ministries of the United
244 Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
- 245 b. Implementing the calls of prior General Synod resolutions, including the 2015
246 Resolution, “A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions Toward a Just Peace
247 in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” and the 2017 Resolution, “A Call for the United
248 Church of Christ to Advocate for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Military
249 Occupation.”
- 250 c. Examining critically our use and interpretations of Scripture as well as liturgies and
251 hymns that equate ancient Biblical Israel with the modern state in ways that promote
252 settler colonialism and the dispossession of Palestinian land, rights, and cultural
253 expressions.

- 254 d. Offering support and encouragement to college students and faculty members as well the
255 human rights groups (including Students for Justice in Palestine, Jewish Voice for Peace,
256 American Muslims for Palestine, and many other allied groups), whose freedom to speak,
257 witness and advocate on university campuses is threatened in any way by state or local
258 governments, or by college administrators.
- 259 e. Advocating for the cessation of U.S. aid to Israel until such time that Palestinian human
260 rights, civil rights, and self-determination are fully realized and protected in compliance
261 with international law, US laws on foreign military assistance, and the principles of
262 human rights.
- 263 f. Supporting the full restoration of US funding for the United Nations Relief and Works
264 Agency which carries out critical services by and for Palestinian refugees, and
265 encouraging continued support for UCC partners which serve Palestinian refugees.
- 266 g. Demanding that the plight of Palestinian refugees be addressed by Israel and the
267 international community based on United Nations Resolution 194 guaranteeing that
268 “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should
269 be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be
270 paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property
271 which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the
272 Governments or authorities responsible.”

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274 **FUNDING**

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276 The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the
277 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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279 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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281 The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within
282 the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

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

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

³ <https://www.vox.com/world/2018/7/31/17623978/israel-jewish-nation-state-law-bill-explained-apartheid-netanyahu-democracy>

⁴ https://www.globalministries.org/ecumenical_statement_on_current_u_s_policy_and_israel_palestine
https://www.globalministries.org/ucc_disciples_leaders_issue_joint_statement_in_response_to_the_peace_and_prosperity_proposal

https://www.globalministries.org/not_peace_but_apartheid_b_tselem_s_brief_response_to_the_trump_plan
https://www.globalministries.org/ucc_disciples_leaders_issue_statement_on_israeli_settlements

⁵ <https://forward.com/fast-forward/410044/trump-education-dept-adopts-controversial-new-definition-of-anti-semitism/> and <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>

⁶ https://www.globalministries.org/mee_resolutions

⁷ <https://www.wrmea.org/israel/palestine/how-settler-colonialism-can-help-us-understand-israel-and-the-us.html> and https://www.globalministries.org/ameu_s_the_link_the_decolonizing_of_palestine_towards_a_one_state_solution_by_jeff_halper

⁸ Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice: <https://www.cryforhope.org/>