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October 5, 2011

Dear sisters and brothers in Mennonite Church USA,

For more than 65 years, Mennonites have witnessed to the good news of Jesus Christ in Israel and Palestine through Mennonite Mission Network, Eastern Mennonite Missions, Mennonite Central Committee, Christian Peacemaker Teams, our colleges and seminaries and in other ways. Some of us have developed deep friendships and bonds of faith with Christian brothers and sisters there.

We know that the ongoing violence and injustice in Israel/Palestine is an undercurrent for violence in the entire Middle East region. What happens in those few square miles impacts all of us.

This is a region with much hurt and pain. In part what is needed is careful listening to the pain and trauma experienced by the Jewish people. These horrors were often committed by those who claimed Christian faith. Ongoing reflection and repentance is called for. At the same time, Palestinians suffer deep and profound loss and pain. Their cries, too, have reached us.

Within Mennonite Church USA the perspectives and commitments related to Israel and Palestine vary greatly. Many of us are deeply anguished by the injustices experienced by Palestinians and readily name the military occupation of Palestine as a sin. Others are relatively uninformed of the realities of daily life in Israel and Palestine. Our views are shaped largely by mainstream American media. And some of us read the Bible through a lens that would regard Israeli occupation of Palestine as part of what we understand as God's unfolding plan.

In December 2009, after years of prayer, struggle and anguish, Palestinian Christian leaders spoke with one voice in a ten page document entitled "Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth." The subtitle of this document was "A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering." This document is addressed to a number of groups, including us as Christians in the global body of Christ. It is a heartfelt and faith-filled cry from our Christian brothers and sisters.

We encourage members of Mennonite Church USA in various settings, to read and discuss this document, which can be found at <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf>.

Recently, in consultation with the Executive Board, we sent a response to the "Kairos Palestine" document from Mennonite Church USA which is attached. We encourage you to read this letter and consider how you might be part of this response. Specifically we invite you to take steps to:

- learn about the situation in Israel/Palestine, including visiting the region and meeting with Christian brothers and sisters there;
- re-examine what the Bible says about the land of Israel and engage in conversation with each other about the theology of Christian Zionism and its impact on Christian brothers and sisters in the region;
- consider how our financial lives are enmeshed in the policies of occupation, especially through our tax dollars and investments;
- deepen our commitment to the way of the cross, which binds together great love for every person and courageous resistance to injustice and sin.

We welcome hearing from how we might work together in these efforts. With our voices, minds and hearts we join Jesus in the prayer that “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

In the peace of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ervin Stutzman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ervin" and last name "Stutzman" clearly distinguishable.

Ervin Stutzman
Executive Director, Mennonite Church USA