

Mennonite Church USA Statement on Israel-Palestine

Preamble

“For more than sixty-five years, Mennonites have lived, studied and ministered in Palestine and Israel... We open our hearts when we again hear of the suffering you experience in an occupied land as homes are taken from you, families and communities are separated by walls and checkpoints, and countless large and small indignities and humiliations are visited upon you each day.”

This excerpt from a 2011 letter written by Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA on behalf of the Executive Board, was a response to *Kairos Palestine*, an appeal from Palestinian Christians in December 2009.

Already in June 2007 ten representatives of Mennonite-affiliated agencies who traveled together to the region reported in an *Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations: Becoming Peacemakers in Israel/Palestine* that, “The continuing Israeli military occupation and the dispossession of Palestinians is sinful, responsible for unjust suffering and a major cause of the ongoing conflict.”

Since 2007 the urgency of the crisis in Israel-Palestine has only deepened, with little progress to show politically and ever-increasing levels of suffering. We find ourselves at a *Kairos* moment, as articulated by Palestinian Christians.

We strongly affirm the longstanding Mennonite presence in the region of Israel-Palestine, including the work of Mennonite Mission Network, Eastern Mennonite Missions, Virginia Mennonite Missions, Mennonite colleges, universities and seminaries, Mennonite Central Committee, Christian Peacemaker Teams and Mennonite Church Canada.

The presence of these workers and others has provided a powerful witness to the way of peace in a place of great conflict. In turn, our understanding of our Anabaptist identity and beliefs has been greatly enriched by interactions with fellow believers and others in the region.

We urge that programs of service to Palestinians and Israelis working for a just peace not only continue but be enhanced, including work by various Mennonite-related groups to improve lives and build peace and advocacy initiatives from Mennonite Central Committee’s Washington (D.C.) Office.

We note the personal and congregational concern that Mennonites have long shared for Christian stewardship and the social and environmental impact of our investments. We believe that the finances contributed to our churches will be used to further our Christian witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we believe that these resources should not be used in the furtherance of pain, death, and suffering of one people at the hands of another. We affirm Everence’s practice of screening investments with attention to issues of human rights and military involvement, among other considerations.

We affirm the “Come and See” initiative of Mennonite Church USA, which seeks to provide opportunities for Mennonite pastors and other leaders to participate in Israel-Palestine learning tours and to “come and see” the current reality (Purposeful Plan, lines 980-984). We encourage all church members who are considering travel to the region to follow the goals and criteria/tour components for Come and See tours as outlined by Mennonite Church USA.

We acknowledge the need for repentance of our own complicity in the history of violence committed by Christians against Jews. All actions that stereotype or demonize people based on their religious beliefs or ethnicity are contrary to the teachings of Jesus and we must have no part in them.

Resolution

In light of the foregoing information, we thereby resolve:

- **To encourage the reading and study of the *Kairos Palestine* document.** We affirm our particular kinship as brothers and sisters in Christ with Palestinian Christians. In this context we hear the “cry for help” expressed in the *Kairos Palestine* document, issued in 2009. Based in a theology of loving ones’ enemies and sacrificial love, this document is worthy of careful study by member congregations of Mennonite Church USA, as recommended by the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board in 2011. In support of this effort, we encourage Mennonite Church USA to develop a structure and process for disseminating and studying the *Kairos Palestine* document and appropriate study materials, in conjunction with the Mennonite Palestine-Israel Network. We encourage congregational resource advocates to make available information about Israel-Palestine.
- **That Israel’s military occupation of Palestine is sinful, based on injustice and must come to an end; and that as U.S. citizens we are complicit in this sin due to our government’s significant and longstanding military support for Israel.** As Palestinian Christian leaders noted in 2009 in the *Kairos Palestine* document, “the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity.” Similarly, the 2007 *Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations* observed, “The continuing Israeli military occupation and the dispossession of Palestinians is sinful, responsible for unjust suffering and the major cause of the ongoing conflict.”
- **To consider how our financial lives are enmeshed in the policies of occupation, through our investments, individual purchases and tax dollars.** To this end, we direct representatives of the Executive Board of the Mennonite Church USA along with representatives from Everence, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Palestine Israel Network, Mennonite Mission Network, and other related agencies involved in the region, in mutual consultation, to review, at least on an annual basis, the investments of Mennonite Church USA for the purpose of withdrawing investments from corporations known to be profiting from the occupation and/or destruction of life and property in Israel-Palestine. A report of this review and related activities should be submitted on an annual basis to members of the Executive Board.

We further urge individuals and congregations to avoid the purchase of products that enable the military occupation to continue, including items produced in Israeli settlements.

In keeping with our historic commitments as a peace church and consistent with our opposition to the militarized resolution of conflict, we condemn the use of violence by all sides. We call for an end to U.S. military assistance to all countries, including Israel. We urge nation-states, including our own, to seek security in the only way it may truly be found, through relationships of mutuality and trust and the guarantee of equal rights for all peoples.

- **To pray earnestly for all Israelis and Palestinians.** As commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, we commit ourselves to pray ceaselessly for all in Israel-Palestine, particularly our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters, all those working courageously for peace including Israeli conscientious objectors, and all who have been impacted by violence.

In addition, we request that a report covering all activities related to this resolution be developed and delivered, under the leadership of the Director of Holistic Witness, at the next Mennonite Church USA convention.