

Dismantle ‘Dividing walls’: The Struggle for Justice and Peace in Palestine Continues

Reflections on the occasion of the World Week for Peace, 18-24 Sept. 2016

Hind Houry, Kairos Palestine

15 September 2016

The Church in Prophetic Action:

Together with many good people around the world, Kairos Palestine welcomes the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel (WWPPI). This call for advocacy and action in support of an end to the occupation aims to liberate the Palestinians from its oppression and to liberate the Israelis themselves from the consequences of its evil upon them. It helps subside the sense of fear and insecurity, builds mutual confidence and hence to construct a just peace. The WWPPI campaign is beautifully supported with resources to guide prayers and actions.

This campaign from the Church is hope in action that we celebrate with joy. This is the proof that while love guides the work of the Church for peace with justice, the prophetic Church stands firm in rejecting evil; the evil of occupation, the evil of discrimination, and the evil of the ‘dividing walls’ of hostility.

In Ephesians, Paul reminds us that Jesus has “abolished the law ..that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of two, thus making peace and ...putting to death that hostility through it” (Ephesians 2:16-17).

In this land, the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, Palestinians lived and practiced religious traditions as Christians, Muslims and Jews. This co-existence and pluralism has been transformed into conflict through the imposition of exclusive rights based to a large extent on interpretations of ‘election’ and ‘promise’. The Kairos Palestine document states that the land is God’s land and that ‘any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice,... transform religion into human ideology and strip the world of God of its holiness, its universality and truth.’ (KP2.4)

Yet the patterns of injustice seem to prevail in total impunity. Among these patterns are physical barriers such as the Separation Wall and military checkpoints that fragment Palestinian society, a prolonged blockade of Gaza and a complex system of colonial settlements.

Yes, it's time for Palestinians and Israelis to share a just peace, it's time for freedom from occupation, it's time for equal rights and, it's time for the healing of wounded souls.

Yet, prolonged injustice prevails

The Separation Wall

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion in 2004, which was adopted as a UNSC resolution, declaring the illegality of the barrier being built on occupied Palestinian territory. It called for its demolition and compensation for those who suffer the consequences of its destruction. **Yet the barrier (or Separation Wall) remains** and with severe negative impact on the Palestinian economy, social fabric, human rights and environment.

The Wall does not only separate Palestinians from schools, fields, work, and neighbors but has been expanded to fully control the Jordan Valley on the Eastern front of the occupied Palestinian Territory. Together with expanding colonial settlements, closed military areas and a segregated road system, Israel provided itself with the full control of about 61% of total land areas in the West Bank richest in natural resources.

According to the Arab Research Institute of Jerusalem, ARIJ, this system of controls has resulted in a major physical impediment towards achieving any sound and sustainable development for Palestinians. ARIJ calculated the cost of the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian economy at

approximately 10 billion U.S. dollars for 2014 only.

A heavy system of barriers hermetically besieges Gaza which is forced into the most inhuman conditions. A United Nations News Centre reported recently that- Gaza could become uninhabitable in 2020 if current trends persist....

Harming the environment

In this context, it is worthwhile to refer to a long but thorough report on environmental injustice in occupied Palestinian territory – by Al-Haq which fully describes the injustice but also provides prospects and legal remedies to overcome them and realize a future peace in the land.

The excuse of security

Israel continues to claim that the measures it adopts against the Palestinian people are necessary as a measure of self-defense. While self-defense is sanctioned by the United Nations as a right to all nations, hence also to Palestinians suffering the brunt of occupation, it also conditions it to adherence to international law. In any case Israel's use of security as an excuse is not convincing as exposed by various analysts and the Report by B'Tselem and Bimkom - Under the Guise of Security Routing This report explicitly states the reasons behind the construction of the Wall are purely political and contradict international law.

Encroaching colonial settlements

According to ARIJ in its report on Israel's settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territory ... "satellite imagery shows that there are currently 196 Israeli settlements in addition to 232 settler outposts in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which take up approximately 45% of the West Bank area. Currently, there are at least 750,000 settlers residing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

In addition, settlers have also been responsible for crimes such as the murder of Palestinian civilians, and often operate with impunity. From June 2014 to May 2015 there were at least 222 settler attacks against Palestinian civilians, 236 attacks against Palestinian religious and historical sites, and 160 attacks against Palestinian property."

Uprooting Olive Trees

During the last few years, Palestinian olive trees — a universal symbol of life and peace and an important source of livelihood for Palestinians – have been systematically uprooted by Israeli forces and settlers in the occupied West Bank as reported in this article, Palestinian Olive Trees: Destroying a Symbol of Life – by Counterpunch.

The way forward: Resistance with love as its logic

While the above is not an exhaustive list of injustice, the Palestinian people with some exceptions pursued the path of nonviolent resistance so well described in the book of Dr. Mazen Qumsiyeh, Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and ... - Amazon.com

Christian Palestinians spoke prophetically on the ways of peace and the 'dismantling of dividing walls' of conflict in the historic Kairos Palestine document, (English - Kairos Palestine). The document describes the occupation as an evil that should be resisted because it destroys the humanity of both the oppressed and the oppressor.

As a movement that calls for active non-violent resistance to the occupation and to injustice, Kairos Palestine advocates for creative resistance in the logic of love and draws on all energies to make peace. "The culture of love is the culture of accepting the other. Through it we perfect ourselves, and the foundations of society are established." (KP: 5.4.3) **This is a humanistic approach that allows an exit from the cycle of violence and concentrates on correcting the evil done to people, their lives, and their livelihood.**

Palestinians have opted to resist creatively through their Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

movement to halt the occupation's discriminatory and unjust policies and practices, as did their brethren in South Africa and in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. We at Kairos Palestine understand that divestment and boycott integrate the logic of love and peaceful resistance. Its objective is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil and ongoing impunity. These are critical times where the threat of violence and terrorism is overwhelming not only in our region but the world. This is the time for deeds not for words only. More churches are called upon to join the prophetic and courageous action for peace by studying and responding to the Kairos Palestine call. Working for justice cannot but include informing about the truth of occupation, respecting and ensuring respect to international law, revisiting theologies that sanctioned occupation and oppression, support active nonviolence as the right of the oppressed and 'come and see' in search of the liberating truth.