



## **Are Western Churches still in Communion with Palestinian Christians? Open Letter of Global Kairos for Justice – Europe (December 2023)**

Palestinian Christians and theologians are raising the question as to whether western churches are still in communion with them. In a situation where – after the violent breaking of international law by the Kassam Brigades, the military arm of the resistance movement Hamas – Israel is potentially committing genocide in Gaza, and certainly committing war crimes according to international law, some churches are keeping silent. They follow the government refusing to even ask for a ceasefire. It is expected that there will be no more Christians or churches in Gaza after the end of the war.

This raises serious ecclesiological questions. In July 2020 Kairos Palestine and its Global Kairos for Justice Network (GKJ) issued the *Cry for Hope*. This document “***calls upon all Christians and on churches*** at congregational, denominational, national, and global ecumenical levels to engage in a process of study, reflection and confession concerning the historic and systemic deprivation of the rights of the Palestinian people, and the use of the Bible by many to justify and support this oppression. We call on churches to reflect on how their own traditions can express the sacred duty to uphold the integrity of the church and the Christian faith concerning this issue. We cannot serve God while remaining silent about the oppression of the Palestinians” (<https://cryforhope.org/>).

Several churches have responded with impressive confessions and responses. The majority of European churches did not realise the seriousness of this call, referring to the tradition of the confessing church in Nazi-Germany and the declaration of a status confessionis in relation to apartheid in South Africa.

The current situation is even more desperate than when *Cry for Hope* was issued, as Palestinians face the possibility of permanent forced expulsion from Gaza, and a breakdown in the rule of law in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We invite us and the European churches to scrutinise ourselves and our actions. According to Bonhoeffer (*Zur Frage der Kirchengemeinschaft. DBW XIV. (1936), S. 655-680*), in situations such as that in Palestine now, churches behave in three ways:

1. As *true church* they confess Christ in spite of all dangerous consequences (in Jesus’ and his case, being executed by the powers),
2. As *erring church* they try to accommodate the powers by not taking a clear stand, and,
3. As *false church* they show complicity with the powers that persecute the church in question.

In the case of the *erring church*, communication has to be intensified in order to win it to the true church, and for a clear confession to be made. With Israel at risk of committing genocide in Gaza, and extinguishing the Christian church there, churches who side with Israel and keep silent without clearly and publicly rejecting Israel’s actions have to ask themselves whether they are complicit as *false churches*. The crisis in Gaza is the latest consequence of Israel’s long-standing settler colonialism project which seeks to replace the indigenous population, and through which – according to human rights organisations and the UN – it has been establishing itself as an apartheid state in order to do so.

Therefore, western churches and church leaders should immediately give a sign of solidarity with our Palestinian brothers and sisters in order to confess Christ in this situation and be in communion with them. The immediate challenge is to call for a ceasefire and to immediately prevent and stop genocide. To act as *true church* in this situation is to acknowledge 75 years of injustice against the Palestinian people, repent of our own Christian failings in supporting and allowing this injustice to continue and now to escalate in a

manner never seen before. We want to declare our commitment to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people now, until they achieve justice, freedom and security together with the Israeli Jewish population. Only together both people will have a future.

