

A Dossier on Israeli Apartheid

A Pressing Call to Churches Around the World

Do Justice to the Afflicted (Ps. 82:3)

Brochure 2 of the series: *Israel – An Apartheid System?*

Prepared by:

Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice

2022



This work is dedicated to the memory of our cherished companion and member of the Global Kairos for Justice,

Rev. Dr Kim Yong-Bock (1938-2022).

<https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/resources/publication>

Introduction

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

We, members of Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice, have created a theological study for Christians and other civil society organizations who want to learn more about the crime of apartheid and why Palestinians and a growing number of churches and human rights organizations are using the word to describe Israel's oppression of Palestinians.

In this guide, you will find: a clear description of apartheid and how Israel's laws, policies and practices meet the international definition; a Biblical/theological reflection describing the sin of apartheid; a heartfelt call to the global church to hear the pleas of Palestinian Christians; and a list of recommended actions. Also included are brief summaries of and links to many of the reports cited above, statements made by churches, faith groups, and international leaders (including prominent Israeli Jews), and a short book list.

We call upon the churches around the world to receive and study this Dossier and respond to the evidence and the call to do justice. It is our hope that this study will equip the global church to rise up and join Palestinian Christians as we work to end Israel's apartheid regime for the sake of all who live in the Holy Land.

+ Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah

Chair of Kairos Palestine

Rifat Kassis

General Coordinator: Global Kairos for Justice Coalition

PART 1

APARTHEID: Defined

(This part is adopted with permission from an earlier article by Palestinian lawyer who currently leads Friends of Sabeel in North America.)

Three important documents define the crime of apartheid and describe its features: The Geneva Conventions; The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid; and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Article 85, 4c of *The Geneva Convention* considers the practice of apartheid a war crime and a crime against humanity. It specifically cites that “the implementation of the system of Apartheid is a grave breach of International Law.” *The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid* defines apartheid as “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them.” *The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)*, Article 7, 1, describes apartheid as “the inhumane acts of a character...committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.” The ICC’s mandate lists apartheid as within its criminal jurisdiction.

Three conditions necessary to establish the crime of apartheid

A careful analysis of the documents reveals three decisive elements necessary to define the crime of apartheid and its paradigms: 1) the implementation of a system of separation or segregation based on race, creed, or ethnicity designed with the intent to maintain domination by one racial group over another is the first element that makes up the crime of apartheid; 2) the use of legislative measures to enforce separation and segregation, essentially legalizing separation from within its own legal system; 3) the commission of inhumane acts, human rights violations, denial of freedoms, and forced ghettoization, i.e., the practices used to impose and enforce separation within its regime.

Identifying these three elements in Israeli apartheid used to be as simple as highlighting how two populations residing in the same territory and sharing the same sovereign power live in vastly different conditions. Jewish settlers who reside in West Bank settlements live under an entirely separate legal, administrative and economic regime from that of West Bank Palestinians. But today’s situation is much more complicated. The regime of apartheid has evolved into something far more disturbing. The designation of apartheid no longer

applies only to the occupied territories annexed in 1967, but to the whole area encompassing the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

Between the river and the sea, it is abundantly clear that Israel meets the definition of the crime of apartheid under international law. Both through the laws the state has adopted and its inhumane practices, Israel actively works to promote separation and segregation through a biased legal regime that offers specific rights and privileges to one group at the expense of the other to maintain its domination. For an Israeli Jew, there are no restrictions to movement or limitations to deciding where to live throughout Israel and the West Bank, while Israel limits the choices for Palestinians. Israeli Jews enjoy certain laws, administrative structures and privileges—such as education, social and health benefits. These are not afforded to Palestinians.

Four further features of Israeli apartheid

Four more features characterizing Israeli-practiced apartheid apply only to the Palestinian population. Jews are exempted based on their Jewish identity. All four features are enacted into laws and military orders in an elaborate system adopted by Israeli authorities through practices and legislative schemes, resulting in the oppressive and discriminatory treatment of the Palestinian population.

Fragmentation

Israel has not only created a system of separation between Jewish and Palestinian populations. It has also managed to fragment the Palestinian community by creating separate identities. Based on where each lives, these geographical “groups” are issued different-colored identity cards and afforded different privileges, in Israeli efforts to manage the Palestinian population and to create division and animosity between Palestinians. These privileges, unlike rights, can easily be stripped away.

Palestinian Arabs living in Israel

The first category of fragmentation, those at the “top of the heap,” are Palestinians living in Israel. Despite holding Israeli citizenship and occasionally serving in the army, they do not enjoy full equality in Israel. While these Palestinians are afforded the most privileges compared with those living in other areas—the right to vote in parliamentary elections, for example—they hold little to no political power. With Israel’s 2018 passage of its Nation State Basic Law, Israel defined itself solely as the state of the Jews, not the state of all its citizens. What Palestinians living in Israel experienced as *de facto* discrimination became discrimination *de jure*. Moreover, there are approximately 63 laws granting privileges to Jews and that are not granted to Palestinian Arab citizens of the state.

Palestinians living in East Jerusalem

Three-hundred-thousand Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem comprise the second category of fragmentation. These Palestinians were given the status of “residents” after the illegal annexation of Jerusalem in 1967. Unlike the Palestinians of ’48 living in the state of Israel, Palestinian Jerusalemites are “residents but not citizens” of Israel. While Israeli law and administration apply to them, they cannot participate in Israeli Elections. One of the greatest threats these Palestinians face is the loss of their right to remain in East Jerusalem. Should they dare to live in Bethlehem or Ramallah or on the outskirts of Jerusalem, they run the risk of losing their residency status—considered by Israel to be a privilege not a right. While East Jerusalemites have fewer privileges than the Palestinian citizens of Israel, they hold more privileges than Palestinians living in the West Bank. One of these privileges is access to the health care system.

Palestinian living in the West Bank

Approximately three million Palestinian residents live in the West Bank. While some administrative power has been given to the Palestinian Authority (PA) within the densely populated cities, the entire West Bank falls under the command, permit system and courts of Israeli military rule. While the PA bravely claims to be a “state in the making”—working to obtain and maintain symbols and appearances of statehood and sovereignty—Israel continues to treat the PA as a subcontractor, assigning it the responsibility of controlling the West Bank Arab population and relieving Israel of its responsibility under international law to provide services.

Palestinians living in Gaza

The two million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip comprise the fourth category of fragmentation. The most disadvantaged of Palestinians, they live in the most crowded place on earth, suffering from a lack of clean water, consistent electric power and other services. Since 2005, Israel has established a military and economic embargo of Gaza in which no person or product can enter or exit without Israel’s approval. In addition, Israel maintains military control over Gaza’s air space and coastline, creating what many have labeled an open-air prison.

Still another category of fragmentation can be added: Palestinian refugees who reside outside Israel and the occupied territory. These refugees and their descendants are still waiting for their right to return to their ancestral homeland. They have zero rights in Palestine. Even the privilege of visiting is many times denied. In contrast, any person on the face of the earth who affiliates with the Jewish religion can enjoy the freedom to immigrate and live in Israel, while receiving financial and economic incentives.

Pervasive permit system

In addition to Israel's systematic fragmentation of the Palestinian people, a second distinctive feature of its apartheid is the pervasive system of permits Israel has instituted to manage nearly every aspect of private and public life. Controlling where one may attend university, access medical care and shop, and establishing and running a business: this biased system limits personal freedom, economic development and the natural growth of Palestinian villages and cities. The arbitrary system of permits and licenses is adjudicated through Israel's military authority in the West Bank. Palestinian Israelis and Arab communities in Israel face some of these same restrictions.

Limit to housing and development

A third feature of Israeli apartheid is the act of limiting where one chooses to live. It is not enough for Israel to separate and favor the Jewish Israeli citizen. Israel controls zoning schemes and ultimately determines and limits how and where Palestinians may live. The limitation of housing and economic development is explicitly seen throughout the Arab areas of Israel and in East Jerusalem. This restrictive zoning scheme is also at work in many parts of the West Bank, most notably area C, comprising 62% of the West Bank where Jewish settlement construction continues to expand at the expense of Palestinian growth, and where virtually no building permits are granted to Palestinians.

Collective punishment

A fourth feature of Israeli apartheid is the persistent use of collective punishment. A violation of international law, collective punishment is the imposition of sanctions, restrictions and/or physical punishment on a group of people in response to the actions of a single person. Israel routinely punishes Palestinian cities, neighborhoods, and families as a means of collective punishment. Gaza is the most prominent example, where its two million inhabitants are repeatedly punished by military force for the acts of a few. Other examples include demolishing an alleged perpetrator's family home and immediately revoking the permits and privileges of a group of people.

Conclusion

A thorough examination of the actual facts on the ground clearly establishes the basis for the charge of the crime of apartheid. Some will charge that labeling Israel an apartheid regime is an expression of antisemitism or an attempt to delegitimize the state of Israel. But to date, those who would distract the world's attention by making such charges have yet to publish a reasoned argument refuting these facts.

To call Israel an apartheid regime, is not a political epithet, nor does it require comparisons with South Africa, but an examination of the actual facts on the

ground, which fulfills the legal elements established for the crime of Apartheid. These elements are so clearly there, that it is no surprise that Israel is worried about the International Criminal Court, or that it seeks to label as “terrorist organizations” those organizations that are carefully documenting its behavior on the ground, in preparation for the day when the ICC will hear this case.

PART 2

APARTHEID: Reports and Statements documenting Israel's complicity

For decades, Palestinian civil society organizations have pointed to the harsh realities of Israel's apartheid regime. Over the years, a few internationally recognized leaders have concurred, including U.S. President Jimmy Carter and South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu. But over the past three years a rapidly growing number of globally respected human rights organizations have issued thoroughly researched reports describing Israel's laws, policies and practices as apartheid. It is important to note that, while each of the following documents have been subjected to repeated accusations of "antisemitism" and "delegitimization of the State of Israel," there has not been a single response that disputes the charges in these reports.

Reports

Beyond the early charges and documented reports of Israeli apartheid by Palestinians and others, recent reports by two Israeli human rights organizations opened the door for further, definitive studies.

Yesh Din: ["The Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and the Crime of Apartheid: Legal Opinion"](#)

[Yesh Din–Volunteers for Human Rights](#) is an Israeli organization registered as a non-profit in Israel and subject to Israeli law. A team of volunteers serve alongside a professional staff including lawyers and human rights experts. In June 2020, Yesh Din published a legal opinion charging that "the crime against humanity of apartheid is being committed in the West Bank. "The perpetrators are Israelis, and the victims are Palestinians." The 58-page report offered this conclusion:

The crime [of apartheid] is committed because the Israeli occupation is no "ordinary" occupation regime (or a regime of domination and oppression), but one that comes with a gargantuan colonization project that has created a community of citizens of the occupying power in the occupied territory... The crime of apartheid is being committed in the West Bank because, in this context of a regime of domination and oppression of one national group by another, the Israeli authorities implement policies and practices that constitute inhuman acts as the term is defined in international law: Denial of rights from a national group, denial of resources from one group and their transfer to another, physical and legal separation between the two groups and the institution of a different legal system for each of them.

B'Tselem: ["A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid."](#)

While Yesh Din's finding of Israeli apartheid was limited to the West Bank, in January 2021 [B'Tselem– The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories](#) issued a report, charging that "The essence of the apartheid regime in place between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is to promote and perpetuate the supremacy of one group over another." B'Tselem (in Hebrew, "in the image") is an independent, non-partisan, globally-awards-winning Israeli organization. Summarizing the findings in the eight-page report, B'Tselem's Executive Director wrote, "Israel is not a democracy that has a temporary occupation attached to it: it is one regime between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, and we must look at the full picture and see it for what it is: apartheid. This sobering look at reality need not lead to despair, but quite the opposite. It is a call for change. After all, people created this regime, and people can change it."

Human Rights Watch: ["A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution"](#)

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is an international non-governmental organization based in New York City with a staff of around 450 people including lawyers and journalists and over 70 nationalities described as "country experts." In the summary of its April 2021 213-page report, HRW writes, "Laws, policies, and statements by leading Israeli officials make plain that the objective of maintaining Jewish Israeli control over demographics, political power, and land has long guided government policy. In pursuit of this goal, authorities have dispossessed, confined, forcibly separated, and subjugated Palestinians by virtue of their identity to varying degrees of intensity. In certain areas, as described in this report, these deprivations are so severe that they amount to the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution."

Accompanying its report, Human Rights Watch created a three-minute [video](#) that describes the elements of apartheid and the charge of apartheid against Israel.

Amnesty International: ["Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity"](#)

[Amnesty International](#) is a non-governmental organization based in the United Kingdom with regional office in cities around the world. Amnesty describes itself as "a global movement... independent of any political ideology, economic interest or religion." In the Executive Summary of its 278-page February 2022 report documenting Israel's apartheid regime, Amnesty writes, "Over decades, Israeli demographic and geopolitical considerations have shaped policies towards Palestinians in each of the different areas of Israel, East Jerusalem, the rest of

the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in different ways... Palestinians experience this system in different ways and face differing levels of repression based on their status and the area in which they live.” Amnesty “has assessed that almost all of Israel’s civilian administration and military authorities, as well as governmental and quasi-governmental institutions, are involved in the enforcement of the system of apartheid against Palestinians.”

United Nations: [“Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967”](#)

In an April 2022 report to the United Nations Human Rights Council, Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk applied tests from the Convention Against Apartheid and the Rome Statute to conclude that Israel’s “political system of entrenched rule in the occupied Palestinian territory... satisfies the prevailing evidentiary standard for the existence of apartheid.” In his meticulously footnoted 18-page report, Lynk documents violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including arbitrary detention, ill-treatment and torture, gender-based violence, restrictions of the rights to freedom of movement, expression, association and peaceful assembly, and violations of the rights to life and physical integrity. Lynk insisted that, because of the vast asymmetry of power, an international intervention is indispensable using a rights-based approach.

Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man; Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association; Habitat International Coalition – Housing and Land Rights Network: [“Entrenching and Maintaining an Apartheid Regime over the Palestinian People as a Whole: Joint Submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied Since 1967”](#)

In January 2022, three Palestinian non-governmental human rights organizations submitted a thoroughly researched report to the UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk as he prepared his April report (above). Quoting directly from the 40-page submission:

Since its inception, the centrality of the racial dimension of Zionism has formed the foundation of Israel’s ever-lasting institutionalised racial discrimination and apartheid regime.... Contrary to the claim that Israel’s prolonged occupation has turned into apartheid, Israel’s occupation is, in fact, part and parcel of the overarching settler colonial and apartheid regime that Israel always intended—and continues—to impose on the Palestinian people as a whole.”

Harvard Law School's International Human Rights Clinic and Addameer:
["Apartheid in the Occupied West Bank: A Legal Analysis of Israel's Actions"](#)

In February 2022, the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School and Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association responded to the call of—and jointly submitted a report to—the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel. The 22-page report with 130 footnotes is focused “on the legal regime enforced by Israel in the occupied West Bank that denies Palestinians their civil and political rights in violation of international law. Specifically, this submission finds that Israel’s actions in the occupied West Bank are in breach of the prohibition of apartheid and amount to the crime of apartheid under international law.” Part I of the report defines the crime of apartheid in international law and outlines applicable legal norms; Part II describes the legal regime enforced by Israel in the occupied West Bank, with a particular focus on discriminatory measures that affect Palestinian civil and political rights; Part III examines the merits of applying the term apartheid in this context and concludes that Israel is in violation of the international law prohibition of apartheid.

For additional reports, studies, statements, books and resolutions see Appendix 1.

Part 3

APARTHEID: A Biblical/Theological Reflection

“We affirm that the continued oppression of the Palestinian people remains... a matter of theological urgency and represents a sin in violation of the message of the biblical prophets and the Gospel, and that all efforts to defend or legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word or deed by the Christian community, represent a fundamental denial of the Gospel.”

Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel, Adopted by the 33rd General Synod of the United Church of Christ, July 2021

In 2009, Palestinian Christian leaders representing a wide range of denominations issued the historic document, “[A Moment of Truth](#): A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering.” The profoundly theological document—grounded in Biblical texts—is a bold, prophetic call naming Palestinian realities as they are and declaring the leaders’ commitment to life in accord with God’s purpose for all to live in love and free from oppression.

In 2020, [Kairos Palestine](#) and [Global Kairos for Justice](#), a worldwide coalition born in response to A Moment of Truth, released “[Cry for Hope](#): A Call to Decisive Action.” Cry for Hope is an urgent plea to Christians, churches and ecumenical bodies “for decisive action on a matter that we believe relates to the integrity of our Christian faith.” Cry for Hope calls the global church to seven specific actions, insisting, “It is time for the international community... to recognize Israel as an apartheid state in terms of international law.”

Apartheid: a contradiction of Biblical faith

Apartheid is not only a crime described in international law. It contradicts core principles of Biblical faith. The Church is called to revisit our holy texts, where we read that in the beginning God created *Adam*—humankind—in God’s own image (Genesis 1:26-28). To refuse to recognize the humanity—the uniqueness, the beauty and the reflection of God’s image—in any one group is a sin.

The Hebrew Bible reflects in large part Israel’s response to life lived under the occupation of one empire after another. Texts affirm the peoples’ faith in the God who liberates the oppressed. God’s self-revealing declaration—*I AM WHO I AM*—appears in Israel’s origin story, when God proclaims, “I have observed the misery of my people... I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters... I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them (Exodus 3:7-8).” To ignore a people’s cry for justice is a sin.

Later, when leaders began to misuse their power and impose laws that divided the people by favoring some over others, God inspired the prophets to cry out, “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream” (Amos 5:24; see also, Micah 6:8; Isaiah 58:6-8). Perhaps the Book of Daniel records the clearest of the Bible’s calls to resist the empires of this world, insisting that God’s sovereignty reigns over all the “kingdoms of mortals (5:21).”

We remember that Jesus was born under the yoke of the Roman Empire. His ministry—the words he spoke, the deeds he accomplished, the relationships he nurtured, both the blessings and the woes he declared—are best understood in the context of a people suffering harsh oppression. The sermon Jesus preached in the synagogue in Nazareth—to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and setting free those who are oppressed—was his social manifesto (Luke 4:18-19). It shaped his ministry and led, eventually, to his crucifixion.

Set free through his forgiveness, grace and promise, Jesus’ followers took up the charge, carrying the Gospel of God’s love and liberating presence “to the ends of the earth”—regarding no one from a human point of view but rather embodying, like Christ, the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16,18) and breaking down walls that divide (Ephesians 2:14).

For the Church to abide any system of injustice, including apartheid, is anathema to God and a rejection of the Gospel.

Apartheid: church theology in the service of state theology

After the Christian faith was imperialized during the time of Emperor Constantine, the Church often served the goals of the state. When Western powers began their global dominance through unchecked capitalism, colonialism and the racism of white supremacy, the Church joined in imposing three evils upon the conquered populations: exploitation of their resources, apartheid, and extinction. History is replete with examples of the Church’s willing embrace of this harsh reality, using its political influence and its mission in the service of the state and committing egregious misuses of the Bible in the process. Only now is the Church in North America more fully coming to terms with theologies that supported—and political positions that furthered—the genocide of indigenous peoples.

The world is still suffering the consequences of two more recent examples of the Church using theology in the service of the state: “German Christians” in Nazi Germany, and the white Lutheran and Reformed Churches in South Africa. Each articulated and promoted a racist theology, one supporting the supremacist political system of National Socialism, the other supporting the apartheid laws of the white supremacist regime of South Africa.

Today, Christian Zionism likewise twists the biblical notions of justice, peace and reconciliation to advance a political theology that rejects Palestinian human rights and endorses Israel's illegal colonization through military aid and diplomatic support. Other church bodies, whose theologies encourage a "balanced" perspective and promote a "dual narrative" approach, neglect the grossly asymmetric power between the occupier and the occupied and thus support the worsening situation on the ground in Palestine and Israel. Still others, valuing their relationships with Jewish friends and colleagues and in acknowledgement of the Church's responsibility for antisemitism, culminating in the horrors of the Holocaust—refrain from criticizing the state of Israel's apartheid regime.

Apartheid: a *status confessionis*

In 1933, German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared that the Nazi regime's denial of the rights of Jews and the interference of the state into matters of religion placed the church in *status confessionis*. The term is Latin, meaning "confessional status." To describe an issue as *status confessionis* means that taking a clear stand on a particular issue is essential to the nature of the Church—that the Church's position either affirms or denies the heart and the meaning of the Gospel. The Barmen Declaration, adopted the next year, affirmed Bonhoeffer's position, insisting on the church's obligation to stand up to injustice and to resist ideologies of tyranny.

When at their 2021 General Synod, the United Church of Christ (UCC) [declared](#) that Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people is "a matter of theological urgency and represents a sin in violation of the message of the biblical prophets and the Gospel, and that all efforts to defend or legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people... represent a fundamental denial of the Gospel," the church effectively declared a *status confessionis*. The UCC Declaration links the obligation to reject the oppression of the Palestinian people with fundamentals of the Christian faith, saying, "Therefore, we reject any theology or ideology including Christian Zionism, supercessionism, antisemitism or anti-Islam bias that would privilege or exclude any one nation, race, culture or religions within God's universal economy of grace."

The UCC wasn't the first to make such a declaration. In 1964, the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Willem Visser 't Hooft, stated that racism, like apartheid, constitutes a *status confessionis* for the churches. In 1977, the Lutheran World Federation declared that "apartheid created a *status confessionis* for the church" and in 1984 suspended the white Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa who practiced apartheid. In 1982, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches declared apartheid incompatible with Christian belief, and suspended the member churches practicing racial separation. The World Communion of Reformed Churches in 2017 affirmed "that with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the

Palestinian Christian community, that the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake.”

The situation in Palestine/Israel is rapidly worsening. Now is the time for the global Church—and each of its constituent bodies—to recognize Israel as an apartheid state and to actively and nonviolently resist its apartheid laws, policies and practices. Why? Because they are violations of international law and, more essentially, because they contradict the Gospel and the blessed community for which we work and pray, “on earth as it is in heaven.”

*“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”
(Amos 5:24).*

Part 4

APARTHEID: What does the Lord require of the Global Church?

“Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands at a distance;
for truth stumbles in the public square,
and uprightness cannot enter.
Truth is lacking...

The LORD saw it, and it displeased him
that there was no justice.
He saw that there was no one,
and was appalled that there was no one
to intervene...”

Isaiah 59:14-16

The realities of Israel’s apartheid have been described from every perspective: legal, social, political, biblical and theological. The cries of Palestinians have exposed their long and brutal experience of apartheid. As the Prophet Isaiah might proclaim, “The Lord sees it, too”—the injustice, truth stumbling in the public square.

Faced with the undeniable truth of Israel’s apartheid, we know what the Lord requires of the Global Church: “To do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).”

The church has named and resisted the sin and injustice of apartheid in the past. **The church is called to rise up once again.**

Apartheid: Some churches’ responses

Among the churches that admit to the reality of Israeli oppression, there have been a variety of responses that fall short in addressing the root cause of the Palestinians’ suffering. They say that use of the word *apartheid*:

“Is not helpful”

But words matter. Churches are called to use the word *apartheid*, whether they find it helpful or not. The word *apartheid* points—in both its definition in international law and its description of realities on the ground—to a truth. Truth matters, and it matters most when it is named. As churches recognize but

hesitate to use the word, we fail to name a fundamental motivation for our taking up the ministry of Jesus “to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, to let the oppressed go free (Luke 4:16ff).” Further, to denounce apartheid affirms Palestinian experience and motivates the international community to explore, embrace and strengthen the framework of international law in a time when it is being eroded though systems of racism, authoritarianism, and other oppressions based on economic, patriarchal, political, and military power—including antisemitism. To call out and denounce Israeli apartheid is extremely helpful.

“Burns bridges and stops dialogue with partners”

It’s true. By taking a clearly expressed stand against systemic injustice, bridges will be burned. Treasured ecumenical and interfaith relations may be broken, especially with those who benefit from the *status quo*. But to seek to be more “diplomatic,” to seek conciliatory approaches in a situation grounded in asymmetrical power imposed economically and militarily, is to avoid the harsh reality of Palestinians. We can expect that taking a prophetic stance will be disruptive to the dynamic of traditional dialogues. Yet, it is faithful: “Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue... (Deuteronomy 16:20).” Churches are called to trust, in times like this, that new dialogue partners will emerge, that former partners may be fruitfully challenged, and that conversations—rooted in truth, compassion, humility and integrity—will realize the promise in Psalm 85:10 “Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.”

“Should be left to the courts to decide”

Some claim that it is not for the church to determine if the crime of apartheid is being perpetrated, that the church should not pre-judge. But there is a Biblical imperative to raise a prophetic voice when an injustice arises. It is precisely the role of the church to hold the nations accountable. At our best, churches and religious communities have called for the highest standards and insisted on the application of international law and human rights when they are grounded on Gospel values.

“Is bad strategy”

Some churches have argued that it is not a helpful strategy for the church to press for the application of international laws and human rights conventions when describing Israel’s policies and practices as apartheid. But drawing attention to laws and conventions agreed upon by the international community is more than a strategic calculation or a political strategy. It is the church’s faithful embrace of every resource that addresses the root cause of a systemic oppression. It is the church’s faithful witness to civil society, world leaders and global institutions that the church is not removed from, but rather a part of, the human community.

“Can you help us?”

The witness of Palestinian Christians insists that the Global Church speak up, take action, and join the world’s growing recognition of Israeli apartheid. Because of their witness, no church can say, “We did not know”—or knowing say, “Our nation’s history impedes us from taking a stand.” In their extraordinary plea, A Moment of Truth, our Palestinian siblings offered this “word to the Churches of the world” [KP 6]: *We ask our sister Churches not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustice we suffer, for the sin imposed upon us. Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back?*

How will your church, council, conference, region or synod respond? The biblical answer is clear. The theological answer is clear. Neutrality is not a faithful response. Denying or ignoring the reality of Israel as an Apartheid State according to the definitions of international law and ethical discernment is not a faithful response. Complicity with a situation of systemic oppression in the name of interfaith solidarity is not a faithful response. Theological and or biblical justification of oppression and injustice is both sin and heresy.

May these words of contrition be an example to all of us in the Global Church, as our Palestinian friends confessed in A Moment of Truth:

Perhaps as individuals or as heads of Churches, we were silent when we should have raised our voices to condemn the injustice and share in the suffering. This is a time of repentance for our silence, indifference, lack of communion, either because we did not persevere in our mission in this land and abandoned it, or because we did not think and do enough to reach a new and integrated vision and remained divided, contradicting our witness and weakening our word. Repentance for our concern with our institutions, sometimes at the expense of our mission, thus silencing the prophetic voice given by the Spirit of the Churches [KP 5.2].

May our faith compel us to intervene to right injustice, lest our God be appalled (ref. Is.59).

Part 5

The Palestinian Plea: “Are you able to help us get our freedom back?”

In 2009, Palestinian Christian leaders issued the historic document, “[A Moment of Truth](#): A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering.” We named Palestinian realities as they are and described life as God is working to redeem it. We wrote, “Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two people attain justice, peace, security and love? (KP 6:1)”

Now, thirteen years later, as conditions in Palestine rapidly worsen, our question is an urgent, earnest plea: “Are you able to help us get our freedom back?”

The venerated Israeli human rights organization, [B'Tselem](#), titled its January 2021 report, “A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid.” Palestinians have been saying it for decades. Now, human rights organizations have said it. United Nations officials have said it. Politicians have said it. Theologians have said it. South African leaders, who lived apartheid and understand apartheid, have said it. Even Jewish Israeli politicians and legal experts have said it. Facts on the ground speak loudly and clearly. The evidence is here to see.

“What will you do about it?” we Palestinians ask the Church, “How will you respond? Are you able to help us get our freedom back?”

Your answer shapes our future

For Palestinians, our struggle for freedom is a matter of utmost importance. We are talking about people’s lives and livelihood. We are talking about our very existence on the land of our ancestors. Israel’s apartheid policies and actions directly and negatively impact millions of Palestinians. The existence of Palestine as a thriving state is in jeopardy. Yet, Israel acts with impunity. The world refuses to hold Israel accountable. Aside from verbal admonitions, Israel suffers no consequences for its failure to adhere to international laws and human rights conventions.

The current situation is unbearable. As a result, many families—Christian and Muslim alike—are choosing to leave, seeking a better life and a just future elsewhere.

The existence of the Palestinian Christian community is at stake. Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem have expressed their deep concern about the tangible threats to the future of Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

As the church ignores these realities, its credibility is questioned. Silence before injustice is equivalent to taking part in the injustice. Silence empowers the oppressor. “Are you able to help us get our freedom back?”

Words matter

We say, “Words matter.” The words the Church uses says a lot about the Church and its response to the issues of the day. We urge our brothers and sisters not to choose words that soften the harshness of the crimes perpetrated upon Palestinian. When the Church refuses to call Israel’s laws and actions *apartheid*, the Church contributes to the continuation of apartheid.

We are troubled when our sisters and brothers are more concerned about their relations with religious dialogue partners than they are concerned about our reality under harsh occupation. We are troubled when our sisters and brothers are more concerned about their image than they are concerned about our suffering. Often, when we speak boldly about our oppression and Israeli apartheid, we are told that our cry is too loud. But when we spoke softly, we were ignored. Too much is at stake—for Palestinians, for the Palestinian church, for the global Church—for us to speak softly and employ euphemisms to describe our suffering.

The church should not wait for the international community to officially describe and condemn Israel’s apartheid. No, a prophetic church should shape and lead the international community. A prophetic, faithful church does not watch from the sideline and act when it is safe, when it has nothing to lose. The prophetic church speaks truth to power. When it comes to justice, human dignity and human rights, we join Peter and the apostles who counseled, “We must obey God rather than any human authority (Acts 5:29).”

Theology matters

The global Church has too often contributed to the suffering of Palestinians. The policies of colonial British power were heavily influenced by a theology that sought to gather the Jews in Palestine in preparation for the church’s redemption. Christian Zionism has been a negative force in Middle East politics. Christian Zionist influence is evident both in massive financial support given to Israel each year and in political lobbying that supports Israel and ignores Palestinian Christians.

In our plea, A Moment of Truth, we wrote that “certain theologians in the West try to attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights.... The ‘good news’ in the Gospel itself has become ‘a harbinger of death’ for us. We call on these theologians to deepen their reflection on the Word of God and to rectify their interpretations so that they might see in the Word of God a source of life for all peoples (KP 2.3.3).” We urge the Church to revisit the Scriptures and to reject any theology that favors one people over another.

A New Vision

Emeritus Palestinian Patriarch Michel Sabbah shares a vision in which the land becomes “like the garden of Eden, a dwelling place for God with humanity, and a homeland for all the children of God.” His vision of an inclusive community expresses the Palestinian Christians’ understanding that the land belongs to God, not to any nation, ethnicity, or religion. We all belong to the land, God’s land.

As we wrote in our 2009 plea, A Moment of Truth. “We believe that God’s goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here ‘a new land’ and ‘a new human being’, capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters (KP 10).”

The struggle for our freedom is not about our targeting the state of Israel. In A Moment of Truth, we have told the Jews that

Even though we have fought one another in the recent past and still struggle today, we are able to love and live together. We can organize our political life with all its complexity according to the logic of this love and its power, after ending the occupation and establishing justice (KP 5:4.2).

So, we ask once again. “Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two people attain justice, peace, security and love?”

Appendix 1

Additional Reports on Apartheid

The following are additional significant reports.

Amb Palestina al Cor's, ["Apartheid Against the Palestinian People"](#)

In 2007, thirty Catalan organizations committed to peacebuilding in the Middle East began a solidarity campaign with the Palestinian people. The group issued an 80-page report in 2009, pointing to the "negation and non-respect of [the Palestinians'] dignity as human beings, which itself has a specific legal denomination: crime of apartheid." The report further stated, "It is clear that the discrimination to which the Palestinian population is subjected by Israel constitutes a crime of apartheid." Currently, the campaign receives the support of more than 60 organizations including NGO federations, unions and political parties.

[Russell Tribunal on Palestine](#)

The Russell Tribunal on Palestine, supported by the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, was "an international citizen-based Tribunal of conscience created in response to the demands of civil society (NGOs, charities, unions, faith-based organisations) to inform and mobilise public opinion and relevant institutions and decision-makers in light of continuing failures to uphold international law in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." In its 9-page 2012 report, the Tribunal found "multiple grounds to refute [Israel's] claim that no apartheid or segregation practices exist under Israeli jurisdiction."

UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)'s ["Israel"](#)

In its 2012 9-page report, CERD expressed its concern about "the consequences of [Israel's] policies and practices which amount to *de facto* segregation, such as the implementation by [Israel] in the Occupied Palestinian Territory of two entirely separate legal systems and sets of institutions for Jewish communities grouped in illegal settlements on the one hand and Palestinian populations living in Palestinian towns and villages on the other hand. The Committee is particularly appalled at the hermetic character of the separation of two groups, who live on the same territory but do not enjoy either equal use of roads and infrastructure or equal access to basic services and water resources. Such separation is concretized by the implementation of a complex combination of movement restrictions consisting of the Wall, roadblocks, the obligation to use separate roads and a permit regime that only impacts the Palestinian population."

Birzeit University Institute of Law's ["Advocating for Palestinian Rights in Conformity with International Law: guidelines"](#)

This guide "is an outcome of the conference 'Options and Strategies of International Law for the Palestinian People' held at the Birzeit University Institute of Law in May 2013. It aims to help nonlawyers understand and apply international law to Israel's oppressive regime over the entire Palestinian people: those in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 1967 (OPT), Palestinian citizens of Israel and the refugees since 1948. It explains briefly: 1) Why speaking only about 'occupation' is not enough; 2) Why we should rather speak about (settler) colonialism, population transfer (ethnic cleansing) and apartheid, in addition to occupation; 3) How we can do so in accordance with international law; and, 4) Why colonialism, population transfer and apartheid, as legal frameworks, are helpful for building pressure on third parties to take action against Israel's oppressive regime.

UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)'s ["Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid"](#)

In a 64-page report commissioned in 2017 by the UN's ESCWA, its authors established "on the basis of scholarly inquiry and overwhelming evidence, that Israel is guilty of the crime of apartheid." The report "accordingly recommends that the international community act immediately, without waiting for a more formal pronouncement regarding the culpability of the State of Israel, its Government and its officials for the commission of the crime of apartheid."

Statements & Resolutions

Following are statements and resolutions made by UN, church, Palestinian Christian, and Jewish groups, as well as other internationals including prominent Jewish leaders. Archbishop **Desmond Tutu** and President **Jimmy Carter** are the two most recognized world leaders to use the word *apartheid* before the rest of the world was ready to use the label. A 2014 article in Haaretz, an Israeli newspaper, [reported](#) on a visit by Tutu to Palestine and Israel. Tutu was quoted as saying, "Israel's treatment of Palestinians reminds him of South African apartheid... I have witnessed the systemic humiliation of Palestinian men, women and children by members of the Israeli security forces. Their humiliation is familiar to all black South Africans who were corralled and harassed and insulted and assaulted by the security forces of the apartheid government." The title to President Carter's 2007 book, widely demonized at the time, spoke—and speaks still—for itself: [Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid](#).

In a speech in Bethlehem in May 2022, South African pastor and theologian **Frank Chikane**, who for many years suffered from and fought against apartheid in South Africa, said the following:

“South Africans don’t need any one to define apartheid for them. If it is apartheid, they can see it or recognise it! ... Having crisscrossed Israel and Palestine and read literature about the occupation (about 55 years), and discriminatory laws, including inhuman laws that fall under the definition of a crime against humanity one does not have a choice but to declare Israel an Apartheid State.”

World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Durban, South Africa, [“Declaration”](#)

In 2001, the General Assembly of the United Nations hosted a global gathering to address racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Included in the Declaration was a strong rejection of “any doctrine of racial superiority....” Participants wrote, “We recognize that apartheid and genocide in terms of international law constitute crimes against humanity and are major sources and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and acknowledge the untold evil and suffering caused by these acts and affirm that wherever and whenever they occurred, they must be condemned and their recurrence prevented.”

NGO Forum of the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), Durban, South Africa, [“WCAR NGO Forum Declaration”](#)

Concurrent with the 2001 UN General Assembly’s Conference (above), representatives of local, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society groups from around the world gathered in their own forum. *The forum’s Declaration is the first time that a wide gathering of civil society accused Israel of practicing apartheid against Palestinians.* In addition to affirming the right of Palestinians to self-determination, statehood, independence and freedom, along with the right of return as stipulated in UN Resolution 194, the document recognized that the Palestinian people are “currently enduring a colonialist, discriminatory military occupation that violates their fundamental human right of self-determination including the illegal transfer of Israeli citizens into the occupied territories and establishment of a permanent illegal Israeli infrastructure; and other racist methods amounting to Israel’s brand of apartheid and other racist crimes against humanity.”

The document further recognized that “the Palestinian people have the clear right under international law to resist such occupation by any means provided under international law until they achieve their fundamental human right to self-

determination and end the Israeli racist system including its own brand of apartheid.”

American Friends Service Committee, [“Why AFSC uses the term “Israeli apartheid”](#)”

“As early as 2003, Palestinian human rights organization (with support from South African anti-apartheid activists) began to describe the situation in Israel and Palestine as a situation of apartheid. Over the next two decades a variety of international and Israeli leaders including former President Jimmy Carter, Israeli Prime Ministers Ehud Olmert and Ehud Barak, and former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry all warned that without change Israel would become an apartheid state.

“We use the term to accurately describe the realities of inequality and discrimination that exist on both sides of the green line in Israel and Palestine. We use it to make clear our commitment to the realization of not just the end of Israel’s occupation, but justice and equality for all people in Israel and Palestine regardless of their location.”

Dr. Jerry Pillay, [“Apartheid in the Holy Land: Theological Reflections on the Israel and/or Palestine situation from a South African perspective”](#)”

In 2016, the [HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies](#), an Open Access resource, published an article by Dr. Jerry Pillay, a faculty member in the Department of Church History and Church Polity at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. According to Dr. Pillay, “The central thesis of this [9-page] article is that the Israel-Palestine situation shows great resemblances to the experience of apartheid in South Africa which can be seen in the colonisation, the war and the forced displacement of people in Palestine. This article attempts, firstly, to show this apartheid comparison and then proceeds to discuss the theological implications of the issues of justice and reconciliation in Israel-Palestine by referring to the same in the South African context. Drawing from the South African experience, the article also offers some reflection on the role of the Church in the Israel-Palestine context.”

National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine (NCCOP), [“Open letter to the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement”](#)”

In 2017, thirty-three Christian organizations—members of NCCOP—gathered in Bethlehem and wrote an open letter to the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the global ecumenical community. Among other requests, they called on the WCC to “recognize Israel as an apartheid state.” They pled, “We need your

costly solidarity. We need brave women and men who are willing to stand in the forefront. This is no time for shallow diplomacy Christians.” They wrote, “Things are beyond urgent. We are on the verge of a catastrophic collapse. The current status-quo is unsustainable....”

UN Independent Human Rights Experts, [“21st century apartheid”](#)

In June 2020, forty-seven independent human rights experts called for the international community to oppose Israel’s announced plan to annex significant parts of the occupied Palestinian West Bank beginning in mid-2020. They wrote, “Israel has recently promised that it will maintain permanent security control between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. Thus, the morning after annexation would be the crystallisation of an already unjust reality: two peoples living in the same space, ruled by the same state, but with profoundly unequal rights. This is a vision of a 21st century apartheid.”

Global Kairos for Justice, [“Cry for Hope: A Call to Decisive Action”](#)

In July 2020, Global Kairos for Justice (GKJ)—a worldwide coalition born in response to the Kairos Palestine document, “A Moment of Truth”—released an urgent call to Christians, churches and ecumenical institutions to embark on seven concrete actions to recognize and end Israel’s apartheid. Citing a list of actions by the U.S. administration that blindly supported Israel, the document said, “In light of these events, it is time for the international community to recognize Israel as an apartheid state.”

International Criminal Court, [“Statement of ICC Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, respecting an investigation of the Situation in Palestine”](#)

In 2021, the International Criminal Court printed a statement by ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda in a news release announcing the opening of the court’s investigation into allegations of violations of human rights and international law. Bensouda said, “The decision to open an investigation followed a painstaking preliminary examination undertaken by my Office that lasted close to five years. During that period, and in accordance with our normal practice, the Office engaged with a wide array of stakeholders, including in regular and productive meetings with representatives of the Governments of Palestine and Israel, respectively.” In her statement, the prosecutor cautioned, “Investigations take time and they must be grounded objectively in facts and law.”

United Church of Christ General Synod, [“Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel”](#)

At its 2021 church-wide Synod, the United Church of Christ passed a resolution that described Israel’s oppression of Palestinians as “a matter of theological urgency [representing] a sin in violation of the message of the biblical prophets and the Gospels.” The resolution cited “Israel’s apartheid system of laws and legal procedures.”

Former Israeli ambassadors, [“It’s apartheid...”](#)

In 2021 on the South African website [Ground Up](#), two former Israeli ambassadors to South Africa penned an OpEd, declaring, ““It is clearer than ever that the occupation is not temporary, and there is not the political will in the Israeli government to bring about its end.” Ilan Baruch served as Israeli Ambassador to South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe; Dr. Alon Liel served as Israeli Ambassador to South Africa and as Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They wrote,

Israel is the sole sovereign power that operates in this land, and it systematically discriminates on the basis of nationality and ethnicity. Such a reality is, as we saw ourselves, apartheid. It is time for the world to recognize that what we saw in South Africa decades ago is happening in the occupied Palestinian territories too. And just as the world joined the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, it is time for the world to take decisive diplomatic action in our case as well and work towards building a future of equality, dignity, and security for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. & Canada, [“Compelled to Witness”](#)

In February 2022, leaders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) issued *Compelled to Witness*, a Pastoral Letter endorsed by the church’s Division of Overseas Ministries board that speaks both *to* the Disciples denomination and *for* the denomination to the world. It reads, in part, “Israeli policies and practices that discriminate against Palestinians—Christians and Muslims alike—are consistent with the international legal definition of the crime of apartheid.”

Jewish Voice for Peace, [“Israeli Apartheid and the Path to Teshuvah”](#)

A February 2022 Open Letter to the Jewish Community from the Rabbinic Council of [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) states,

As Jews of conscience, Israel's system of apartheid has created a moral emergency for us. We cannot turn away. Instead, we long for the kinds of conversation which accurately reflect the reality on the ground, a reality that B'Tselem calls Jewish Supremacy...."

Michael Benyair, former Attorney General of Israel, [“With great sadness I conclude that my country is now an apartheid regime”](#)

In February 2022, in an OpEd for The Journal, former Attorney General of Israel Michael Benyair wrote, “It is with great sadness that I must also conclude that my country has sunk to such political and moral depths that it is now an apartheid regime. It is time for the international community to recognise this reality as well.” A former acting judge in the Israeli Supreme Court, Benyair went on to write, “The status quo on the ground is a moral abomination. The delay by the international community in taking meaningful steps to hold Israel accountable for the apartheid regime it is perpetuating is unacceptable.”

Jewish Electorate Institute, [“July 2021 National Survey of Jewish Voters”](#)

A July 2021 survey commissioned by the Jewish Electorate Institute found that 34% of American Jews agreed “Israel’s treatment of Palestinians is similar to racism in the United States.” Some 25% agreed “Israel is an apartheid state” and 22% agreed “Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinians.” 58%, said it would be appropriate to restrict aid to Israel so it could not spend US money on settlements. The numbers climbed among younger Jews; more than a third of those under 40 gave Israel the “apartheid state” label.

Independent Jewish Voices (IJV), [Together Against Apartheid](#)

In March 2022, Independent Jewish Voices Canada, launched a campaign called [Together Against Apartheid](#). According to the [press release](#), the campaign is aimed at educating and empowering people across the country to end Israel’s oppression against Palestinians.

Selected Books and papers:

Brian Brown, *Apartheid South Africa! Apartheid Israel!: Ticking the Boxes of Occupation and Dispossession* (2022)

Ben White, *Israeli Apartheid: A Beginner’s Guide* (2009) and *Cracks in the Wall: Beyond Apartheid in Palestine/Israel* (2018)

Uri Davis, *Israel, an Apartheid State* (1987) and *Apartheid Israel: Possibilities for the Struggle Within* (2003)

Ilan Pappé (ed.), *Israel and South Africa: The Many Faces of Apartheid* (2015)

Ghada Ageel (ed.), *Apartheid in Palestine: Hard Laws and Harder Experiences* (2016)

Sizer, Stephen. *A Biblical Response to Israeli Apartheid*. [Online source](#)

Cornerstone, Issue 48, Spring 2022. A Publication by Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. [Online source](#).

Appendix 2

Cry for Hope

CRY FOR HOPE: A CALL TO DECISIVE ACTION

WE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND THE OPPRESSION OF THE PALESTINIANS

Public launch: 1st July 2020

Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice

We, Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice, a worldwide coalition born in response to the Kairos Palestine “Moment of Truth: a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering,” issue this urgent call to Christians, churches and ecumenical institutions. We do this together with committed Christians in Palestine and around the world. **This is a call for decisive action** on a matter that we believe relates to the integrity of our Christian faith.

We have arrived at a critical point in the struggle to end the oppression of the Palestinian people. The State of Israel’s adoption of the Nation State Law in 2018 legalized institutional discrimination in Israel and the Palestinian territories, officially depriving Palestinians of their rights to life, livelihood, and a future in their homeland. Recent acts of the U.S. administration have supported Israel’s ongoing project of land taking and attaining control over the entire territory of Palestine. These include the 2018 move of its embassy to Jerusalem, its announcement in 2019 that the U.S. government no longer deems West Bank settlements to be “inconsistent with international law,” and the 2020 “Peace to Prosperity” plan. Fueled by U.S. support and emboldened by the ineffectual response of the international community, Israel’s newly-formed coalition government has cleared the way for outright annexation of around one third of the occupied West Bank, including the Jordan Valley. These developments make it all the clearer that we have come to the end of the illusion that Israel and the world powers intend to honor and defend the rights of the Palestinian people to dignity, self-determination, and the fundamental human rights guaranteed under international law, including the right of return for Palestinian refugees. It is time for the international community, in light of these events, to recognize Israel as an apartheid state in terms of international law.

In affirming this reality, we realize that it is incumbent upon us as followers of Jesus to take decisive action. The very being of the church, the integrity of the Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. We declare that support for the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word or deed, is a sin. We assert that Christian support for Zionism as a theology and an ideology that legitimize the right of one people to deny the human rights of another is incompatible with the Christian faith and a grave misuse of the Bible.

We call 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.

As we face this *kairos*, we are mindful of the legacy of faith and action of those who have come before us and have faced circumstances of urgency and crisis. In 1933 German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared that the Nazi regime's denial of the rights of Jews and the interference of the state into matters of religion placed the church in *status confessionis*. The Barmen Declaration of 1934 reinforced the church's obligation to stand up to injustice and to unequivocally oppose ideologies of tyranny. In 1964 the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Willem Visser 't Hooft, stated that racism, like apartheid, constitutes a *status confessionis* for the churches. The WCC followed this word with action in 1969 in implementing its courageous and far-reaching Program to Combat Racism. In 1977 the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) declared that "apartheid created a *status confessionis* for the church" and in 1984 suspended the white Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa who practiced apartheid. In 1982 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declared apartheid incompatible with Christian belief, and suspended the member churches practicing racial separation. The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in 2017 affirmed "that with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, that the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake" and directed the General Secretary to initiate six direct action steps. Since 2009, Kairos documents from ecumenical organizations from around the world have appeared in response to the Kairos "Moment of Truth" document of the Palestinian Christians, pledging action and providing theological affirmation of this prophetic call by the Palestinian churches.

The present times call for actions as bold, as faithful, and as resolute. The time for decision has arrived. "We call out as Christians and as Palestinians to our Christian brothers and sisters in the churches around the world" reads the 2009 Kairos Palestine document. Eight years later, in 2017, in the Open Letter to the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement, the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine wrote: "Things are beyond urgent. We are on the verge of a catastrophic collapse. This is no time for shallow diplomacy, Christians!" Now, three years later, this is a cry for hope to our brothers and sisters throughout the world. We invite our fellow Christians, their local congregations, churches and international ecumenical organizations, to receive and respond to our common witness, to join the process of confessing, and to initiate processes to formally reject the oppression of the Palestinian people and any use of the Bible to justify this injustice by committing to the following actions:

- **Initiate processes** at local, denominational and ecumenical levels that recognize the present kairos and the urgent requirement for decisive action regarding the denial of Palestinian rights and the misuse of the Bible. These actions will express the unity of the church in its commitment to stand up to injustice wherever it is to be found.

- **Engage in study** and discernment with respect to theologies and understandings of the Bible that have been used to justify the oppression of the Palestinian people. Offer theologies that prophetically call for an inclusive vision of the land for Israelis and Palestinians, affirming that the creator God is a God of love, mercy and justice; not of discrimination and oppression.

- **Affirm the Palestinians' right to resist** the occupation, dispossession, and abrogation of their fundamental rights, and join the Palestinians in their creative and nonviolent resistance. The 2005 Palestinian call for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) provides a framework for economic, cultural, and academic measures and for direct political advocacy as nonviolent means to end occupation and oppression. The purpose of BDS is not to punish or isolate Israel. It is rather to exert pressure on Israel to comply with international law, and to call upon its government and its people, in the spirit of the Word of God, to enter into the ways of justice and peace, thereby affirming its own rights as well as the rights of the Palestinian people.

- **Demand** also that governments and world bodies employ political, diplomatic and economic means to stop Israel's violations of human rights and international law.

- **Oppose anti-Semitism** by working for justice against anti-Judaism, racism and xenophobia; oppose the equating of criticism of Israel's unjust actions with antisemitism.

- **Support initiatives** between Israelis and Palestinians and interfaith partnerships that combat apartheid and occupation and create opportunities to work together for a common future of mutual respect and dignity.

- **Come and see** the reality in the Holy Land with compassionate eyes for the suffering of Palestinians, and stand in solidarity with grassroots initiatives on the part of all faiths and secular groups who challenge the occupation and who work for a just peace.

We make this call out of concern for the future of both peoples. In the words of Kairos Palestine, our call is rooted in the *logic of love* that seeks to liberate both the oppressor and oppressed in order to create a new society for all the people of the land. We continue to hold firm to the hope articulated in the Kairos document that Palestinians and Israelis have a common future -- that "we can organize our political life, with all its complexity, according to the logic of love and its power, after ending the occupation and establishing justice." As followers of Jesus, our response to ideologies of exclusivity and apartheid is to uphold a vision of

inclusivity and equality for all peoples of the land and to persistently struggle to bring this about.

We acknowledge that by our commitment as Christians to the liberation of the Palestinian people we stand against the theology of Empire, a global order of domination manifesting in racial, economic, cultural, and ecological oppression that threatens humanity and all of creation. In making this confession, we embrace our membership in the community of the broken bread, the church fulfilling its mission to bring the good news of God's gift of love, mercy, compassion, and abundant life for all.



2022

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