

## Ovt 12-05

*On Jewish - Christian Dialogue and the Israeli Presence in Palestine—From the Presbytery of San Francisco.*

**Call The 223th (2018) General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:**

- 1. Urge its members, congregations, presbyteries and national staff units, to reach out in open, truthful dialogue with our Jewish colleagues, engaging the issue of the Israeli occupation of Palestine.**
- 2. Encourage freedom and boldness to criticize practices and policies of Israel, as we do any other global political entity, without fear of being labelled anti-Semitic.**
- 3. Insist that boundaries for acceptable discourse on Israel not be set unilaterally by, but mutually agreed upon by all responsible partners in the discourse.**
- 4. Listen to and acknowledge Christian voices suffering under occupation, which may counter the voices of those, who live in comfort with full equal rights, thousands of miles from that same occupation.**
- 5. Articulate our Reformed faith with confidence, humility and integrity, and anticipate respect for our own faith convictions, as we also would respect others.**
- 6. Assure confidentiality to Jewish colleagues who share perspectives which are critical of Israel, and which may compromise their congregational or organizational standing.**
- 7. Challenge dialogue partners to build on common values for justice and peace in Israel/Palestine. If persistence dialogue fails to transform, withdrawing from that partnership may be necessary.**
- 8. Facilitate the above dialogue by directing the General Assembly Mission Council to consider preparing study resources and urge Presbyteries to provide opportunities for study to further educate church members about truthful, open interfaith dialogue.**

### *Rationale*

1. Collegiality of relations between Presbyterians and our Jewish colleagues in the decades following the Holocaust, has included healthy and necessary self-examination regarding Christian anti-Semitism in our scriptures and our theology, as well as partnership in a wide range of social justice issues. Yet the issue of Israel is uncharacteristically fraught with tension in recent years. This overture seeks to open a more honest, searching and respectful season of dialogue that breaks new ground in these relationships.
2. Jews and Christians share the same Abrahamic tradition, the same God, values, holy text, and the Holy Land, where Abraham, Moses and Jesus walked. Much of our interfaith conversations center on safe programs and issues, and while meaningful, we tend to avoid the single-most consequential issue of our day for Jews, Muslims and Christians.
3. For too long the foundation of dialogue rests upon ongoing Christian repentance for anti-Jewishness, acceptance of Israel as central for Jewish identity, and unencumbered by any substantive criticism of Israel.
4. When there is resistance to dialogue from others, we relinquish our resolve and therefore are complicit to injustice by our silence.
5. Our relationship with Jesus Christ, his call to justice and peace, surpasses all others, including our interfaith relationships. “We must stand by people in any form of suffering and need, to stand where the Lord stands, against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ, the church must witness against the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests, and thus control and harm others.” (Belhar Confession)
6. It may be that there is no other hope than through our united Jewish and Christian efforts that the occupation might end and peace be attainable.
7. Jewish leadership, in the US, Israel and abroad privately acknowledge that the occupation is apartheid, systematic ethnic cleansing, unsustainable as colonization, and that a Jewish state is incompatible with democracy. They acknowledge that Zionism is based on racism, is not equivalent to Judaism and does not reflect

basic Jewish values. Rabbis who avoid criticizing Israel for fear of dividing their congregations or losing donors, are in a difficult position. While stifling themselves, they desire this conversation.

8. While being sympathetic to the state of Israel as a response to the atrocities of the holocaust, it is not exempt from moral responsibility or accountability within the framework of international law, and behavior demanded of any other nation. The United States Department of State has declared: “Criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic.”

9. Our U.S. special relationship with Israel provides it with more than one-third of all U.S. foreign aid. We have a special responsibility to make sure that aid is used to promote peace, not perpetuate social injustice. Our complicity with Israel obligates us to address this concern.

10. “As much as we can, we should meet friendship with friendship, hostility with kindness, generosity with gratitude, persecution with forbearance, truth with agreement, and error with truth.”

[http://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/principles\\_interfaith\\_dialogue.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/principles_interfaith_dialogue.pdf)

### **Responding to People Who Say Criticizing Israel’s Occupation of Palestine is “Anti-Israel”**

Many Jews and Christians in Israel and the United States who strongly support the State of Israel are also deeply troubled by Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza. It is with pain and sorrow that friends of Israel witness Israel’s oppressive policies and actions in the West Bank. It is with great sadness the promise of human rights for all peoples in the Holy Land for which we hoped, is unrealized, replaced instead by policies that promote the interests and rights of Israeli Jewish citizens, and that deny human rights and a nationality to Palestinians.

It is hard for many Americans and Christians to openly criticize Israeli actions. We may fear disturbing our relationships with some of our Jewish or Christian brothers and sisters. It is difficult for many Christians to publicly criticize the policies of Israel’s government for fear that legitimate criticism may be seen as anti-Israel or anti-Semitic. Some Christians believe they must silence their criticism of Israel’s policies because of the history of the Holocaust and the failure of many Christians to speak out at the time.

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the infrastructure of the illegal Israeli settlements, by-pass roads, checkpoints and separation wall/barrier that constitute the oppression of the Palestinian people are in plain view for all to see. But when confronted with criticism, those who defend the military occupation often use the following tactics:

- Ignore irrefutable facts on the ground: illegal settlements, checkpoints, separation wall, bypass roads, and denial of Palestinian human rights.
- Deflect, confuse and conflate issues to divert attention from the facts on the ground.
- Intimidate those who oppose Israel’s laws, practices and policies that suppress Palestinian human rights with accusations that they are anti-Israel, anti-Semitic and/or support terrorism.
- Never call the Palestinian people “Palestinians”. Call them “Arabs” and then cite anti-Israel actions by Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and other Arab states to justify Israel’s occupation of Palestine.
- Claim Israel is the victim, not the oppressor.
- Ask why critics of Israel’s practices focus on Israel instead of other world problem areas.

**Responses to false claims that critics of Israel’s occupation practices and policies in the West Bank and Gaza are “anti-Israel”:**

### **Is criticism of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza “anti-Israel”?**

No. Such criticism intentionally focuses on Israel’s laws, practices and policies that promote the occupation of Palestinian territories and not Israel’s right to exist. Most critics of Israel’s occupation of Palestine also strongly support the right of Israel to exist within the internationally recognized 1967 borders and emphatically condemn violence against civilians by all parties. Israel, like all nations, has the right to provide security for their citizens by taking appropriate measures that are consistent with international law. Holding Israel accountable to these same global standards is not anti-Israel.

Many Israeli and American Jews oppose settlement colonies on Palestinian land, all of which are illegal under international law. Within the Israeli and U.S. Jewish communities there is a growing, active and passionate debate about whether Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is in the best interest of Israel. Each side in this debate is pro-Israel, trying to discern how to assure a secure, viable and sustainable state. Christians must support the pro-Israel positions that advocate for human rights and justice for the Palestinian people, and reject the positions that promote the systematic oppression of the Palestinian people. When patriotic Americans spoke out against slavery, racial segregation, or the Vietnam and Iraqi wars, some Americans falsely accused them of being anti-American. Critics of Israel's occupation of Palestine may also be falsely accused of being anti-Israel, but they are not. They are pro-human rights.

### **Is criticism of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza anti-Semitic?**

No. Anti-Semitism is discrimination against or prejudice or hostility toward Jews. Criticism of Israeli government actions is not criticism of Jews as people or of Jewish religion or culture. Many Jewish individuals and human rights organizations oppose Israel's continued occupation of Palestine. Christians must, with confidence, reject any politically motivated charges of anti-Semitism that are made to silence legitimate criticism of Israel's apartheid practices. This kind of hyperbolic language is untrue, harms civil discourse and serves to hamper efforts to monitor and prevent Israeli human rights violations.

### **Why must Christians speak out against the Israeli occupation of Palestine?**

After World War II when the horror of the Holocaust was revealed, Jews around the world said "never again." Many Christians around the world were shamed by their silence during the 1930's as Jews in Germany were given special cards identifying their religion, had their businesses shut down, had their land expropriated and were confined to live in separated enclaves or ghettos. Christians vowed that never again would they be silent if a government passed laws establishing and maintaining the domination by one ethnic group over another ethnic group through systematic separation, oppression and denial of basic human rights. Silence in the face of evil was wrong then, and it is wrong now. Christians spoke out in the 1950's against segregation in the United States and in the 1970s against apartheid in South Africa. They must again raise their voices and speak out Israel's violation of human rights and international law in Palestine.

### **How may criticism of Israel's occupation policies affect interfaith relations between Jews and Christians?**

Building strong interfaith relationships with our Jewish brothers and sisters is important. They are built on mutual interest, honesty and integrity. Inter-faith conversations encompass social justice issues such as hunger, homelessness, discrimination, human rights, war and peace. Israel's policies in occupied Palestine are but one issue. The Jewish community itself is divided on it. Honest dialog ultimately builds stronger relationships, while silence erodes them. Through honest dialog we may find Jewish people who support the occupation and others who agree it must end. We must have confidence that our inter-faith relationships, built on many social justice issues, are strong enough to sustain a disagreement on the wisdom of Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

### **Is Israel's militarily occupation of Palestine needed for security reasons?**

No. At any time since 1967 Israel could have allowed the United Nations to occupy the West Bank and provide security. U.N. peacekeeping missions have been successful in dozens of countries. However, if the U.N. had occupied Palestine to provide security in 1967 or anytime thereafter, it would have preserved the land for residents of a Palestinian state and not allowed Israel to expropriate Palestinian land to build Jewish settlement colonies. Israel does not need to occupy the West Bank for security reasons. It chooses to occupy the West Bank so it can expand its borders and dominate the Palestinian people.

### **Why single out Israel when social injustices occur in many middle eastern countries?**

Since Israel receives more than one-third of all U.S. foreign aid, we are responsible and accountable for its use to prevent social injustice, not to perpetuate it. Israel is the world's 16<sup>th</sup> richest country, has the 4<sup>th</sup> largest army, is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest arms producer, the 6<sup>th</sup> largest arms dealer, the 4<sup>th</sup> largest nuclear power (refusing to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty), and has defied 70 United Nations Security Council resolutions seeking peaceful reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinian. U.S. complicity with Israel obligates us to address this.

### **Do Israel's laws, policies and practices towards Palestinians constitute apartheid?**

Under the 1973 United Nations convention, “apartheid” means acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group over any other racial group and systematically oppressing them. Practices constituting apartheid include:

- Denying basic human freedoms, including the freedom of movement, residence, opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment.
- Denying basic human rights, including the right to a nationality, to education, to leave and to return to one’s country, to work and to form recognized trade unions.
- Expropriating landed property belonging to a racial group or groups or to members thereof.
- Legislative measures, designed to divide the population along racial lines by the creation of separate reserves and ghettos for the members of a racial group or groups

In May 1967, Palestinian residents of the West Bank, as Jordanian citizens, enjoyed most of the basic human rights and freedoms of a modern nation. But since June 1967, these residents have been stripped of most of these rights by an Israeli military occupation that systematically distinguishes, excludes, dominates and oppresses Palestinians on grounds of ethnicity. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the infrastructure of the illegal Israeli settlements, by-pass roads, checkpoints and separation wall/barrier that constitute the oppression of the Palestinian people, constitutes apartheid as defined by the United Nations.