UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST PALESTINE ISRAEL NETWORK

Statement

On the First Anniversary of the Great March of Return

March 30, 2019

“O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save? (Habakkuk 1.1-2)

On March 30, 2018, Palestinians living in Gaza began a sustained protest against the ongoing military occupation of Palestine, demanding the right of Palestinians and their descendants displaced from their ancestral lands by Israelis to return home. Called the Great March of Return, the protests have focused on the right of return and have also called attention to the on-going blockade of the Gaza Strip which has imposed deplorable living conditions on its Palestinian residents, exacerbated now by the cutting off of humanitarian aid by the United States. These protests have occurred in the context of a stalled peace process, a continued harsh occupation, and unilateral actions by the United States designed to punish Palestinians while advancing a political trajectory in Israel that is increasingly right wing and non-democratic.

The largely peaceful protests have been met by a violent Israeli response resulting in approximately 200 Palestinian deaths and casualties in excess of 23,600 according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. This overwhelming and disproportionate response, while not deterring the protesters, has been denounced by the United Nations General Assembly and human rights groups such as Amnesty International, B’Tselem, and Human Rights Watch. In early March the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, denounced Israel’s dismissal of the Human Rights Council’s report. That report found the vast majority of deaths and injuries caused by Israeli Defense Forces to be unjustified and recommended that its findings be referred to the International Criminal Court for “investigation into alleged international crimes and violations.”

In light of all this, the ancient words of the Prophet, “How long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen,” remind us of the urgent need for justice lest the despair of the oppressed fuel a violent uprising or worse, the permanent demoralization and subservience of the Palestinian people. The United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network, committed to justice for all in a peaceful Palestine and Israel, calls upon all congregations and members of the United Church of Christ to mark this anniversary of the beginning of The Great March of Return by:

- Encouraging the courageous resilience and witness of Palestinians protesting the occupation of their land by Israel by communicating support for them to our global partners in the region as a sign of our solidarity and commitment to accompaniment.
- Supporting UCC and Disciples Global Partners® in Palestine and Israel advocating for human rights, providing educational and humanitarian relief, supporting community development, and promoting interfaith understanding and cooperation.
• Calling the Thirty-second General Synod of the United Church of Christ to support the proposed resolution on Global Forced Migration, which includes the rights of Palestinian refugees, at its meeting in June, 2019.

• Boycotting products made in illegal Israeli settlements, divesting from companies that profit from the Occupation, and calling for accountability in the distribution of U.S foreign aid to Israel

• Advocating for legislation to be submitted in Congress that would seek to hold Israel accountable for its military detention of Palestinian children

• Protesting actions by the US government that undermine prospects for a peaceful, negotiated settlement, including the relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem, the closing of US consular services in East Jerusalem, the cutting off of humanitarian aid, and the unilateral endorsement of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights

As members of the United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network we grieve the loss of life by those who have sacrificed much for their bold witness. On this anniversary day, at a time when Israel is once again launching assaults on Gaza, we commit ourselves to a sustained witness for peace with justice for all with the confidence that God who is indeed listening will one day answer and save.

*For a list and description of UCC and Disciples Global partners in Palestine and Israel, and a description of their work, see https://www.globalministries.org/israel_palestine

Go to www.UCCPIN.org for more information about the United Church of Christ Palestinian Israel Network.