

1 DECLARATION FOR A JUST PEACE BETWEEN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

2
3 Submitted By:

4
5 Shalom United Church of Christ, New Haven, Connecticut

6
7 With the Concurrence Of:

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9 First Church, United Church of Christ, Guilford, Connecticut

10 First Congregational Church, UCC, Old Lyme, Connecticut

11 Meriden Congregational Church, UCC, Meriden, New Hampshire

12 Union Congregational Church, UCC, Angels Camp, California

13 Pilgrim United Church of Christ, Carlsbad, California

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15 SUMMARY

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17 The resolution calls on the General Synod to adopt a *Declaration on the Requirements for a Just*
18 *Peace Between Palestine and Israel* articulating the principles that must be in place and honored
19 in any future just and peaceful relationship between Israel and Palestine. The *Declaration*
20 affirms that justice, understood both as adherence to the message of the Hebrew prophets and the
21 life and teachings of Jesus, as well as to applicable international laws, is the fundamental and
22 requisite principle which must guide a peaceful future for Israel and Palestine. It rejects a future
23 imposed by military power, illegal occupation and dispossession, or unilateral annexation of land
24 and the use of an imperialistic theology as justification. *The Declaration* pronounces Israel's
25 continued oppression of the Palestinian people a sin, incompatible with the Gospel. It further
26 calls upon Local Churches, Conferences, and Associations to adopt this *Declaration* as their
27 plumline to guide their support for the aspirations of our partners in the region and their
28 advocacy with the United States' government for policies consistent with these principles.

29 The resolution draws on over fifty years of General Synod actions, statements by UCC officers,
30 and actions by Global Ministries and its historic component bodies. It is informed by the witness
31 of ecumenical partners, including the National Council of Churches, USA, and the World
32 Council of Churches, and it responds to the witness of our Palestinian Christian partners, and in
33 particular *Kairos Palestine: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love From the Heart of Palestinian*
34 *Suffering* (2009) and *Kairos Palestine: Cry for Hope, A Call for Decisive Action* (2020).

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36 The *Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ* reminds us that "God calls the church to
37 accept the cost and joy of discipleship. . . and resist the powers of evil." The *Declaration* calls on
38 the United Church of Christ to engage in a costly act of solidarity and accompaniment with the
39 Palestinian people and to resist the oppressive dispossession, occupation, and economic and
40 military oppression of Palestine.

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43 BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL, THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

In *Kairos Palestine: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love From the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* (2009), Palestinian Christians assert that

our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land. In light of the teachings of the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political programme, but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. It was the initiation of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth” (*Kairos Palestine* par. 2.3).

The promise of God regarding land and blessing in Genesis was ultimately not about possession of land, but about the role of the people of Israel as a blessing that “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12.3).

United Church of Christ biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann writes that “the Torah and the world it evokes are beyond a possessed land, and this notion links to ‘a true community of all’ that transcends any tribalism” (*Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*,” 2015, p. 37). He goes on to quote Jewish philosopher Martin Buber: “This entire history of the road from Ur of the Chaldees to Sinai is a consequence of choices and partings, events of history – tribal history and national history. But above them stands revelation [which] gives them their meaning, points out to them their goal. For the end of all these partings is a true community of all men.”

In 1987 the General Synod affirmed its recognition that God's covenant with the Jewish people has not been rescinded or abrogated by God, but remains in full force, inasmuch as “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29) – a clear rejection of Christian supersessionist theology. Along with this, however, the General Synod in 2003 rejected the theological claims of Christian Zionism which seek to privilege Jews in the modern State of Israel over others who share the land, and instead, while recognizing “the diversity of biblical perspectives on the question of a Jewish homeland,” also “affirms that all such perspectives should be grounded in the message of justice and peace taught by Jesus and the biblical prophets.” That message is summarized in the passage from Isaiah that Jesus quotes in Nazareth to inaugurate his ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isaiah 61.1-2; Luke 4.18-19). Isaiah reminds us that the mere accumulation of property at the expense of justice and righteousness offers only a barren future: “Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land” (Isaiah 5.8).

The United Church of Christ, through its mission agencies, has maintained a close relationship with the Palestinian Christian community, as well as the wider Arab population of Palestine. For

87 decades it has supported churches and church-related agencies, as well as human rights,
88 humanitarian, and social justice organizations in Palestine and Israel to the end that God's
89 blessings might be shared by all in the land and that the violence and oppression that have
90 afflicted the region for over seventy years may end.

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92 Consistent with these understandings, the General Synod has repeatedly called for the
93 implementation of a vision of the future for Israel and Palestine based on justice and security for
94 all and the principle of self-determination. In 1973 the General Synod affirmed that "peace and
95 security can be attained only through a just and stable political settlement that takes into account
96 the legitimate aspirations of all the peoples in the area and, particularly, the right to existence of
97 the State of Israel and the rights of the Palestinian Arabs." In 1997 the General Synod called for
98 a negotiated agreement on the status of Jerusalem "that respects the human and political rights of
99 both Palestinians and Israelis, as well as the rights of the three religious communities."

100
101 In 2005 the General Synod called upon United Church of Christ settings and members "to use
102 economic leverage, including, but not limited to: advocating the reallocation of US foreign aid so
103 that the militarization of the Middle East is constrained; making positive contributions to groups
104 and partners committed to the non-violent resolution of the conflict; challenging the practices of
105 corporations that gain from the continuation of the conflict; and divesting from those companies
106 that refuse to change their practices of gain from the perpetuation of violence, including the
107 Occupation." Further, the same Synod in a resolution on Israel's construction of the separation
108 barrier, called upon the Israeli government "to cease the project to construct the barrier, tear
109 down the segments that have already been constructed, and make reparations to those who have
110 lost homes, fields, property, and/or lives and health due to the barrier and its effects."

111
112 In 2015 the General Synod called on United Church of Christ settings "to divest any direct or
113 substantive indirect holdings in companies profiting from or complicit in human rights violations
114 arising from the occupation of the Palestinian Territories by the state of Israel" and to "boycott
115 goods identified as produced in or using the facilities of illegal settlements located in the
116 occupied Palestinian territories." In 2017 the General Synod called on Israel to honor the United
117 Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, calling attention to the practice of military
118 detention for Palestinian children, denial of access to legal assistance, and the use of physical and
119 emotional abuse. Most recently, in 2019 the General Synod called for advocacy for Palestinian
120 refugees specifically as stipulated in UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (1948), and for
121 continued US funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

122 123 TEXT OF THE MOTION 124

125 WHEREAS for over seventy years Palestinian people have faced dispossession of their land,
126 displacement from their homes, a harsh military occupation, severe restrictions on travel, the
127 military detention of their children, home demolitions – over 25,000 to date and the constant
128 threat of more – and vast inequities in access to natural, economic, and medical resources when

129 compared to that enjoyed by Israeli citizens living in illegal West Bank settlements, and also on a
130 daily basis face severe restrictions on access to their olive groves, farms, and holy sites; and

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132 WHEREAS there are more than 5.6 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United
133 Nations Relief and Works Administration representing a global displacement of Palestinian
134 people dating back to 1948 whose future status remains unresolved; and

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136 WHEREAS the Israeli government has maintained an illegal military occupation of Palestinian
137 territories since 1967 that includes the establishment of illegal Jewish-only settlements
138 throughout the West Bank and more recently has enacted formal discrimination against its Arab
139 citizens through the passage of the Nation State Law in 2018; and

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141 WHEREAS provocative actions under the Trump administration, including moving the U.S.
142 embassy to Jerusalem, the suspension of humanitarian aid to the United Nations Relief and
143 Works Administration, and support for Israel's proposed illegal annexation of land in the
144 occupied West Bank have further injured the Palestinian community and imposed serious road
145 blocks to peace; and

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147 WHEREAS the Trump Administration's Department of Education has issued a rule labeling any
148 criticism of the State of Israel as an antisemitic act in order to suppress advocacy for Palestinian
149 rights on university campuses, and has joined many state governments in further suppressing
150 freedom of speech in support of Palestinian civil society's call for boycotts, divestment, and
151 sanctions; and

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153 WHEREAS actions by Israel, with tacit and overt support from the United States government, have
154 established conditions comparable to those in force under Jim Crow in the United States south
155 between Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement, with segregation laws that enshrined
156 systematic domination and oppression by whites over blacks. Israel's acts of domination and
157 oppression include, but are not limited to adoption of the Nation State Law in 2018, the building of
158 the separation barrier, implementation of a restrictive pass system for Palestinians, the creation of
159 Israeli-only highways through the West Bank, and imposed military detention of Palestinian
160 children accused of crimes; and

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162 WHEREAS the General Synod of the United Church of Christ and its officers have for over fifty
163 years advocated for a negotiated process leading to a just peace between Israel and Palestine
164 marked by adherence to international law and international standards of human rights and
165 honoring the principle of self-determination and the rights of Palestinian refugees; and

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167 WHEREAS, reminiscent of historical examples such as the United States, Canada, Australia,
168 and Southern Africa, Israel exhibits a current-day form of settler colonialism, actively
169 engaged in the removal and erasure of the indigenous Palestinian population, through a
170 matrix of control that includes: the imposition of a harsh military occupation; the de facto
171 annexation of Palestinian lands and threats of further annexation; the expansion of illegal

Jewish only settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank; the contraction of Palestinian-controlled land; and the restriction of travel for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

WHEREAS *Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action* issued by Palestinian Christian leaders and theologians in July, 2020, states that “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”;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-third General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopts the following *Declaration*:

1. *We affirm* that the continued oppression of the Palestinian people remains, after more than five decades of oppression of the Palestinian people, 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.

Therefore, we reject the notion that Israel’s occupation of Palestine is a purely political problem outside the concern of the church or that the oppression of the Palestinian people is an inevitable consequence of global or regional geopolitical interests.

2. *We affirm* that the biblical narrative beginning with creation and extending through the calling of the Israelites, the corrective admonitions of the prophets, the incarnation and ministry of Jesus and the witness of the apostles to the “ends of the earth” . . . speaks of God’s blessing extending to “all the families of the earth.” (Genesis 12.3)

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 religion within God’s universal economy of grace.

3. *We affirm* that all people living in Palestine and Israel are created in the image of God and that this bestows ultimate dignity and sacredness to all;

Therefore, we reject any laws and legal procedures which are used by one race or religion to enshrine one people in a privileged legal position at the expense of another, including Israel’s apartheid system of laws and legal procedures.

4. *We affirm* that all peoples have the right to self-determination and to their aspirations for sovereignty and statehood in the shaping of their corporate religious, cultural, and political life, free from manipulation or pressure from outside powers, and that a just resolution of conflicting claims is only achieved through peaceful negotiation based on

international law and UN resolutions, the equal protection of civil rights, and the fair and just sharing of land and resources.

Therefore, we reject the use of Scripture to claim a divine right to the land as the rationale for Israel's illegal seizure and annexation of Palestinian land as well the imposition of so-called peace agreements by Israel or the United States through the exercise of political and military domination that leaves Palestinians without equal rights, full citizenship, and the opportunity to thrive religiously, culturally, politically, and economically.

5. *We affirm* the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes if they so choose or to be compensated for their loss of property, consistent with UN General Assembly resolution 194 (1948).

Therefore, we reject the denial of this right, just as we reject efforts to manipulate internationally-agreed upon definitions of refugees to attempt to erase this right which extends across generations.

6. *We affirm* the First Amendment constitutional right to freedom of speech and assembly to protest the actions of the State of Israel and to uphold the rights of Palestinians, including the use of economic measures to support justice as a First Amendment right and joining the international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement by individuals, institutions, corporations, and religious bodies that advocate peace with justice or participate in any aspect of the use of economic measures to support justice.

Therefore, we reject the idea that any criticism of policies of the State of Israel is inherently antisemitic, and we oppose the efforts of U.S. federal and state governments to limit free speech on university campuses and to restrict or ban support of the international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that national setting of the United Church of Christ send the text of this *Declaration* be sent to Local Churches, Associations and Conferences; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that all settings of the United Church of Christ be encouraged to receive this *Declaration* as a prophetic call for renewed and continued advocacy for a just peace in Palestine and Israel and use it as a plumbline for taking action, including:

- a. Committing to hearing the voices of Palestinians regarding their situation, including the voices of Palestinian Christians through the study of Palestine Liberation Theology, attention to statements and appeals such as *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth* (2009) and a *Cry for Hope* (2020), participation in travel seminars that expose visitors to the Palestinian community, and use of resources from Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
- b. Implementing the calls of prior General Synod resolutions, including the 2015 Resolution, "A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions Toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," and the 2017 Resolution, "A Call for the United

Church of Christ to Advocate for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation.”

- c. Examining critically our use and interpretations of Scripture as well as liturgies and hymns that equate ancient Biblical Israel with the modern state in ways that promote settler colonialism and the dispossession of Palestinian land, rights, and cultural expressions.
- d. Offering support and encouragement to college students and faculty members as well the human rights groups (including Students for Justice in Palestine, Jewish Voice for Peace, American Muslims for Palestine, and many other allied groups), whose freedom to speak, witness and advocate on university campuses is threatened in any way by state or local governments, or by college administrators.
- e. Advocating for the cessation of U.S. aid to Israel until such time that Palestinian human rights, civil rights, and self-determination are fully realized and protected in compliance with international law, US laws on foreign military assistance, and the principles of human rights.
- f. Supporting the full restoration of US funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency which carries out critical services by and for Palestinian refugees, and encouraging continued support for UCC partners which serve Palestinian refugees.
- g. Demanding that the plight of Palestinian refugees be addressed by Israel and the international community based on United Nations Resolution 194 guaranteeing that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.”

FUNDING

The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.