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A PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN CALL TO END THE OCCUPATION..

A group of Palestinian Christians representing a variety of churches and church-related organizations have issued an animated and prayerful call for an end to occupation of Palestine by Israel.

The call, issued at a 11 December meeting in Bethlehem, comes at a time when many Palestinians believe they have reached a dead end. It raises questions to the international community, political leaders in the region, and the churches worldwide about their contribution to the Palestinian people's pursuit of freedom. Even in the midst of "our catastrophe" the call is described as a word of faith, hope and love.

Referred to as "The Kairos Palestine Document" the call echoes a similar summons issued by South African churches in the mid-1980s at the height of repression under the apartheid regime. That call served to galvanize churches and the wider public in a concerted effort that eventually brought the end of apartheid.

The authors of the Kairos Palestine Document, among them Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah from the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Lutheran Bishop of Jerusalem Munib Younan, and Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, have raised the challenge of the urgency for peace with justice to religious and political leaders in Palestinian and the Israeli society, international community, and to "our Christian brothers and sisters in the churches" around the world. They believe that current efforts in the Middle East are confined to managing the crisis rather than finding pertinent and long term solutions to the crisis.

Decrying empty promises

Expressing their pain, the signatories of the call decry the emptiness of the promises and pronouncements about peace in the region. They remind the world about the separation wall erected on Palestinian territory, the blockade of Gaza, how Israeli settlements ravage their land, the humiliation at military checkpoints, the restrictions of religious liberty and controlled access to holy places, the plight of refugees awaiting their right of return, prisoners languishing in Israeli prisons and Israel's blatant disregard of international law, as well as the paralysis of the international community in the face of this tragedy.

Rejecting Israeli justifications for their actions as being in self-defence, they unambiguously state that if there were no occupation, "there would be no resistance, no fear and no insecurity."

They argue: "God created us not to engage in strife and conflict but together build up the land in love and mutual respect. Our land has a universal mission, and the promise of the land has never been a political programme, but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. Our connectedness to this land is a natural right. It is not an ideological or a theological question only." They reject any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice.

Declaring the occupation of Palestinian land as a sin against God and humanity, they steadfastly adhere to the signs of hope such as "local centres of theology" and "numerous meetings for inter-religious dialogue", recognizing that these signs provide hope to the resistance of the occupation. Through the logic of peaceful resistance, resistance is as much a right as it is a duty as it has the potential to hasten the time of reconciliation.

Asserting that this is a moment demanding repentance for past actions, either for using hatred as an instrument of resistance or the willingness to be indifferent and absorbed by faulty theological positions, the group calls on the international community and Palestinians for steadfastness in this time of trial. "Come and see [so we can make known to you] the truth of our reality", they appeal.

Poignantly, they conclude, "in the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. 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."

The authors are: • Patriarch Michel Sabbah • Bishop Dr Munib Younan • Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna • Rev. Dr Jamal Khader • Rev. Dr Rafiq Khoury • Rev. Dr Mitri Raheb • Rev. Dr Naim Ateek • Rev. Dr Yohana Katanacho • Rev. Fr Fadi Diab • Dr Jiries Khoury • Ms Sider Daibes • Ms Nora Kort • Ms Lucy Thaljieh • Mr Nidal Abu Zulof • Mr Yusef Daher
• Mr Rifat Kassis - coordinator of the initiative

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Full text of the Kairos Palestine Document:

In English [http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2009pdfs/Kairos Palestine_En.pdf](http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2009pdfs/Kairos%20Palestine_En.pdf)

In Arabic [http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2009pdfs/Kairos Palestine_Ar.pdf](http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2009pdfs/Kairos%20Palestine_Ar.pdf)

Auf Deutsch <http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc->

[main/2009pdfs/Kairos Palestine Ger.pdf](#)

En français <http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2009pdfs/Kairos Palestine Fr.pdf>

For the list of signatories: <http://kairospalestine.ps/?q=node/2>

Churches in the Middle East: solidarity and witness for peace: <http://www.oikoumene.org/?id=3113> Additional information: Juan Michel,+41 22 791 6153 +41 79 507 6363 media@wcc-coe.org The World Council of Churches promotes Christian unity in faith, witness and service for a just and peaceful world. An ecumenical fellowship of churches founded in 1948, today the WCC brings together 349 Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican and other churches representing more than 560 million Christians in over 110 countries, and works cooperatively with the Roman Catholic Church. The WCC general secretary is Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, from the Methodist Church in Kenya. Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland.

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And From Ecumenical News International (Switzerland):

Jerusalem (ENI). Palestinian Christian leaders have issued a call for an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, which they described as, "a sin against God and against humanity," and have appealed for support from the world's churches.

"The injustice against the Palestinian people, which is the Israeli occupation, is an evil that must be resisted," the Christian leaders said in a document that was almost two years in the making. "Resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as its logic," they said. "It is thus a creative resistance, for it must find human ways that engage the humanity of the enemy."

The initiators of the statement, made public at an 11 December meeting in Bethlehem, have referred to the text as the "Kairos Palestine" document. "Kairos" is a Greek word used in the Bible for a God-given time of challenge, grace and opportunity.

The organizers said that their statement echoes the Kairos document that South African churches issued in the mid-1980s, and which helped

galvanise churches and the wider public in a concerted effort that eventually led to the end of apartheid.

"It is a call to the international community worldwide to look at the plight of the Palestinians and put pressure on Israel to conform to international law," spokesperson and coordinator Rifat Kassis told Ecumenical News International.

"Despite the talk about peace and the peace process conducted for 17 years, nothing has happened and the situation continues deteriorating," Kassis said. "It is the right time for a more ethical perspective on the conflict, and that should come from religious leaders."

The full title of the document is, "A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering". Signatories include the former leader of the Roman Catholic Church in the region, Latin Patriarch emeritus Michel Sabbah; the Lutheran bishop of Jerusalem Munib Younan; and Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna of Sebastia from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

"The aim is to free both peoples [Israelis and Palestinians] from extremist positions of the different Israeli governments, bringing both to justice and reconciliation," the Palestinian Christian leaders stated. "In this spirit and with this dedication, we will eventually reach the longed-for resolution to our problems, as indeed happened in South Africa and with many other liberation movements in the world."

The signatories accused Israel of "disregard of international law and international resolutions". Issues faced by Palestinians, they said, included the "separation wall" that cuts through Palestinian territories, Israeli settlements and "daily humiliation" at military checkpoints.

Rejecting Israeli justification for Israel's actions being in self-defence, the Palestinian Christian leaders said, "There would be no resistance, no fear and no insecurity" if there were no occupation.

"The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity," the Palestinian Christian leaders stated, "because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier, just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation."

The initiative brought together leaders of most Palestinian Christian

denominations and prominent Christian theologians, said Kassis.

The Geneva-based World Council of Churches helped facilitate the formation of the document, which also addresses churches worldwide including WCC members who may have differing views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The signatories, acknowledging that they are small in number, said their message was, "great and important" not only to Christians but also to Muslims and Jews. To their Muslim neighbours, they sent a "message of love and of living together," while at the same time urging them to reject fanaticism and extremism. They also called on the world to reject uninformed views of Muslims so that they were not, "stereotyped as the enemy nor caricatured as terrorists". To their Jewish neighbours, the signatories affirmed the possibility of a shared life despite past struggles.

The Christian leaders condemned all forms of racism including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and called on Christians world wide to, "say a word of truth and to take a position of truth with regard to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land".

The writers also urged churches around the world, "not to offer a theological cover up for the injustice we suffer, for the sin of the occupation imposed on us".

Kairos Palestine document:

www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2009pdfs/Kairos%20Palestine_En.pdf

Kairos Palestine website: www.kairospalestine.ps