



Friends of Sabeel--North America

Voice of the Palestinian Christians

SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL SABEEL CONFERENCE
NAZARETH AND JERUSALEM
NOVEMBER 12-19, 2008

THE NAKBA: MEMORY, REALITY AND BEYOND

We are more than 200 Christians from five continents who have come together to commemorate the tragic events that occurred 60 years ago in the lives of the people of Palestine. While we have come to hear from and to offer our solidarity and support to the indigenous Palestinian community in both Palestine and Israel, we have also heard from brothers and sisters in the Muslim and Jewish communities as they too have borne witness to the injustices visited upon the Palestinian population of this land. They have seen more than 531 villages depopulated and destroyed, and the creation of more than 750,000 refugees who have not been allowed to return to their homes since 1948.

We recognize the irony in the coincidence that this year also marks the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The establishment of peace with justice requires that the full truth be told about the events of 1948 and the subsequent displacement of hundreds of thousands more Palestinian citizens in 1967, a process which has continued to the present day. The human rights of the Palestinian people continue to be crushed under a military occupation that dehumanizes both oppressed and oppressor. We share our conviction that it is only an acknowledgement of the full truth behind and within this current state of oppression that will lead to true freedom for all parties in the conflict.

Truth is essential for peacemaking. We acknowledge the truth that our silence about the status of the Palestinian people equals complicity in this ongoing tragedy. The status quo is a crime against humanity. As Christians, we can no longer be silent. Things worsen as each day passes. The so-called peace process is rather a consistent and persistent process of death and destruction, both physically and spiritually. The Nakba - the catastrophe - that has been imposed and is still being imposed on the people of Palestine--continues unabated and unrestrained. The truth of it is silenced or ignored both in our churches and in our media. This must change if we are to be true to Jesus' call to be peacemakers.

We have been encouraged by the thousands of Palestinians and Israelis who have practiced methods of nonviolent resistance in seeking to bring an end to the current conflict. We lift up the practice of nonviolence as the most practical means of achieving peace in this situation where the balance of military power is so overwhelmingly one-

sided and where the reliance upon violence only continues to make matters worse. We are concerned by the use of the Bible as an instrument of colonialism and exploitation by those who would enlarge the conflict. We reject the exclusivism presupposed in such an interpretive approach to biblical truth. We seek the reconciliation of all peoples throughout the world, and therefore call on our brothers and sisters in the worldwide church to speak out and act out the ministry of reconciliation.

We have been touched by the faces of children wherever we have gone. We have come to realize that an entire generation of children is being crippled because they have no access to the nutrition needed for normal growth and development, and thus endure spiritual and social alienation, violence and lack of opportunities which none of us would tolerate even for a day in our own communities. We remember the call of the Nobel peace laureates that the first decade of this new century be devoted to nonviolence. We hear anew the call of Jesus to "let the little children come unto me," to let them be placed in the center of the current picture of marginalization, thus challenging the international community with their vulnerability and their need for protection. Therefore, we call upon all our churches and governments:

- to work with renewed energy for an end to this endlessly spreading military occupation;
- to insist on full implementation of all United Nations resolutions and all human rights requirements in international law which pertain to Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories and the right of return for Palestinian refugees;
- to insist on greater freedom of movement and more humane conditions in the occupied territories;
- to insist that Israel accord equal rights to all its citizens, Jewish and Palestinian alike;
- to divest themselves from investments in companies that enable the occupation;
- to insist that Israel lift its ongoing siege and collective punishments which prevent the free movement of people, goods and humanitarian aid in and out of Gaza; and finally
- to support the work of Sabeel in its efforts to build bridges of nonviolence between people in all the monotheistic religions represented in the region.

We have heard the call of urgency from our fellow Christians in this holy land. As in Jesus' own day, so Bethlehem lies under military occupation today surrounded by a prison wall. Our memories of the birth of The Child of Bethlehem 2000 years ago are contrasted and challenged by the reality of the children and the parents and the grandparents of Bethlehem today. As followers of that holy child, may our spirits meet in Bethlehem's streets as we join in prayers and actions for light and life! May we seek creatively to disturb the status quo with acts born of the Spirit of courage, love and truth.

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