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Open Letter to Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentage

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

I send very warm greetings from Cape Town to you all.

Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag is a special organization that occupies a special place in this old man's heart.

It has played an exemplary and prophetic role in gently nudging modern Germany, with its powerful economy, towards using its power actively and compassionately for justice.

I remember how, in the 1980s, you struggled with your consciences over taking "a clear stand" against apartheid – and ultimately acted on your impulse to do the right thing, closing your accounts at Deutsche Bank over its dealings with South Africa. Thank you.

You understood how inter-connected we human beings are, our family ties, as it were – sisters and brothers as we all are in God's family on

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earth.

Today, many of us are concerned about the conflict in the Holy Land, a conflict with roots extending all the way back to World War II that contributes to a level of global insecurity the world has never experienced before.

Much as we condemn those who fire rockets from Palestine at civilian targets in Israel, Israel's military assault on Gaza in response, last year, was not only cruelly disproportionate; it was also a brutal demonstration of Israel's contempt for the people of Palestine.

The beliefs, ideological convictions and fears of leading voices on both sides of the equation – Israeli and Palestinian – are too extreme for them to be able to view the situation through a sufficiently wide prism to be able to stop the cycle of violence and hatred. There has been too much hurt.

The *Conference Statement of the Kairos Palestine 5th Anniversary* in December 2014 expressed deep concern about Israel's ongoing and expanding occupation of Palestinian territory. In 2013, more settler homes were approved for construction on Palestinian land than in any year since 1967. The statement warned that repressive societal dynamics, on top of the continuing settlement policies, "make an independent state of Palestine existing in peace alongside the State of Israel almost impossible to imagine".

The Kairos Palestine Document (Section 6 - Our word to the Churches of the world) urged churches "to stand alongside the oppressed and preserve the word of God as good news for all rather than turn it into a weapon with which to slay the oppressed".

As South Africans and Germans, we arguably know better than most, from our own histories, what damage the authors of injustice and hatred inflict upon themselves. Those with the power to commit inhuman acts profoundly damage their own humanity.

Because of our special knowledge about human rights and justice, I believe that there is a particular onus on our countries to contribute to lasting peace and stability in the Holy Land. Is that not how families should work?

As Christians, it is our duty to side with the oppressed, the downtrodden, the poor, the prejudiced and unjustly treated – ALWAYS. There is no place for neutrality, because it favours the oppressors. Always.

Did the prophet Elijah not support Naboth over Ahab, the king of Israel,

who stole his land?

Does Psalm 99.4 not proclaim, "Mighty king, you love what is right; you have established justice in Israel; you have brought righteousness and fairness"?

In 2007, the World Council of Churches issued "The Amman Call". The full text is too lengthy to include here, but, having heard the voices of the Christian churches of Palestine and Israel, it concluded with a number of challenges.

Christians were challenged to, "Act with us to liberate all peoples of this land from the logic of hatred, mutual rejection and death, so that they see in the other the face and dignity of God."

And to: "Raise your voices along with ours as we speak "truth to power" and name with courage the injustices we see and experience. The illegal occupation has stolen two generations of lives in this tortured place, and threatens the next with hopelessness and rage."

Last July, the World Council's Central Committee issued the "Statement on Economic Measures and Christian Responsibility towards Israel and Palestine". Brave and creative initiatives by the churches were needed, "to become better stewards of justice in economic affairs which link them to ongoing violations of international law in occupied territory".

Finally, the *Conference Statement, Kairos Palestine 5th Anniversary (2014)* notes: "We commit to promoting in both churches and in our societies the Kairos call, which echoes Palestinian civil society demands, for the implementation of boycott, divestment, and sanctions as appropriate non-violent avenues of creative resistance until the illegal Israeli occupation is brought to an end."

BDS is not antisemitism. Do business with Jews, organize with them, love them. But don't support – militarily, economically or politically – the machinery of an apartheid-state. We can't do business as normal because conditions in the Holy Land are totally abnormal.

Please tell your government that mere words of concern are insufficient. They don't change anything. The appropriate response when confronting injustice is to take real steps to confront and eradicate it.

The late Richard von Weizsäcker, former President of Germany and President of the Kirchentag, demanded just this in a letter to the EU signed by many European elder statesmen in 2010.

Beware of anti-semitism, and all other forms of racism, but beware also

of being cowed into silence by those who seek to stifle criticism of the oppressive politics of Israel by labeling you anti-Semitic.

I implore you to listen carefully to what Kairos Palestine is saying. Our Christian sisters and brothers in the Holy Land cannot use balanced synod statements expressing sympathy for oppressor and oppressed alike. They are asking all of our help to win their collective freedom back.

Please join the ecumenical Kairos movement and raise your voice in public solidarity to liberate Palestine so that Israel can be free, too.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

Love

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Desmond Tutu', followed by several horizontal strokes that suggest a flourish or the end of a signature.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu
Cape Town, South Africa