

Life with Dignity: Kairos Palestine 5th Anniversary

Kairos Palestine | Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum | Alternative Tourism Group
Conference Statement

From December 2–4, 2014, over 250 participants from Palestine and many other countries [1] gathered in Bethlehem to commemorate the 5th anniversary of “A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering,” known as Kairos Palestine. The document,[2] produced by a broadly ecumenical group of Palestinian Christian leaders, offered a word of hope in a hopeless situation. It signalled a strong commitment for Palestinian Christians to participate fully in creative resistance to end Israeli occupation, a reality we again describe as “a sin against God and humanity.”

The document has developed into an active global movement. People in many other contexts, inspired by Kairos Palestine, have linked their local struggles for justice with the Palestinian struggle for freedom and dignity for all peoples in Palestine and Israel. We thank God for the many churches that have received, studied, and offered comment on the document. We thank God also for the many ways Kairos Palestine is accompanied by so many Kairos movements around the world, each seeking justice in their own context, joining their struggle to that of the Palestinian people.

Our gathering acknowledged that many aims and goals of the Kairos Palestine document have not been achieved. These five years have brought a great deal of suffering in Palestine, in Israel, and throughout the Middle East. Israel’s oppressive policies and its continued occupation of Palestinian land contribute directly to this suffering. The work of Kairos Palestine and the movement it has inspired is not yet finished.

ANALYZING THE CONTEXT

One of the strengths of Kairos Palestine was its clear analysis of the situation faced by all Palestinians. The context has changed during the past five years, mostly for the worse.

Regionally, the past five years have seen the events known collectively as the “Arab Spring.” Many Arabs have moved from great optimism for civil society to the brink of despair. These developments have brought an eruption of religiously-sanctioned extremism throughout the Middle East. Millions of people have experienced unprecedented suffering and displacement.

These regional developments have had negative outcomes on the Arab Spring and have shaped the context for discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Geopolitical analysts have suggested that regional concerns supersede the need for ending Israeli occupation. We remain convinced that ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an essential step toward healing the Middle East. We therefore urge policymakers around the world to take urgent steps to bring their national policies into line with international law so a just peace can be established.

The past five years have seen the further entrenchment of Israel's occupation. 2013 saw the greatest number of settler homes approved to be built on Palestinian land since 1967. Beyond the structural violence and oppression of Israeli occupation, we have witnessed a sharp increase in settler violence, including assaults on human life and attempted occupations of holy sites. Expressions of racism by Jewish citizens of Israel and religiously-sanctioned extremism on the street have been complemented by legislation proposing specific ways Israel should be considered an exclusively Jewish state. Along with continuing settlement policies, these dynamics within Israeli society make an independent state of Palestine existing in peace alongside the State of Israel almost impossible to imagine.

More recently, we have seen threats to the historic status quo governing the Haram al-Sharif (the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound). These specific tensions highlight the particular problems being faced in Jerusalem today. During this conference, we also heard the Palestinian Christian witness from Gaza, reminding us that our children have experienced three wars in five years.

Even with these negative developments, we are now experiencing a Kairos moment where focused action can have positive effects. US leadership is no longer at the centre of the so-called peace process, signalling a change in the international political landscape. Palestinian political leaders are now approaching the United Nations and related institutions for a political solution and legal actions that limit the culture of impunity in the whole region. We see that many other powers—especially in Europe—are speaking in favour of ending the illegal Israeli occupation and recognizing the State of Palestine. The European Union and certain parliaments have taken tentative steps toward imposing trade restrictions on goods produced in illegal Israeli settlements. We urge them to intensify their efforts although we fear that their words may be too little, too late.

RESPONDING TO THE KAIROS CONTEXT

In June 2007, the Amman Call announced a challenge to the Church: “No more words without deeds. It is time for action.” The conflict afflicting both Israel and Palestine is surrounded by many words. We continue to call the Global Church to action through costly solidarity.

Participants in this 5th anniversary conference, therefore, affirmed the value of:

1. Listening carefully to Palestinian Christian voices

- We recommit ourselves to listening to Palestinian Christian voices, amplifying them and allowing their perspectives to guide our communication and action in our own contexts.
- With Palestinian Christians, we commit ourselves to be ministers of reconciliation and cultivators of hope. “We do not lose heart. . . . We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4.16, 18).
- We commit ourselves to accompanying Palestinian Christians in fellowship of the World Council of Churches in the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace.

2. Continued theological exploration and critique

- We commit ourselves to careful study of and dialogue with the Palestinian Christian theological narrative. Palestinian contextual theology should determine the ways Christians from other contexts comprehend and interact with the Palestinian context.
- We reaffirm the theological foundations of Kairos Palestine, which promotes a theology of faith, hope, and love. This Kairos Theology reaffirms life and calls each of us to costly solidarity. We will work to promote Kairos Theology not just in our own words, but in the offices of church-related institutions, including schools and seminaries.
- We take responsibility for the political implications of theological perspectives we have received and commit to developing alternative theologies that affirm the rights of all human beings.
- We seek responsible forms of theological and political engagement with Jews, Christians, Muslims and all people of good will committed to work toward a just peace for both Israel and Palestine.
- We support the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) goal of confronting theological concepts and interpretations of the Bible (including those promoted by Christian Zionists) that legitimize, promote or accept the illegal Israeli occupation.

3. Active participation in creative resistance

- Creative resistance respects and preserves the human dignity of all persons caught in the present system of oppression through steadfastness (sumud) and resisting empire, along with acts of noncompliance and civil disobedience and all other practices of nonviolent resistance.
- Creative resistance links struggles for justice in many contexts to the struggle in Palestine.
- Creative resistance incorporates literature, music, drama, dance, and visual art into public expressions of resistance.
- Creative resistance finds ways to help keep the memories of Palestine alive in the Palestinian context so the Palestinian narrative continues to be deeply rooted in the land, steadfast like the roots of the olive tree.

4. Continued promotion of economic pressures

- Economic systems undergird every aspect of Israel's continued illegal occupation of Palestinian land.
- We commit to investigating and critiquing tourism systems that create false perceptions of the situation in Israel and Palestine while developing positive ways to promote responsible pilgrimage and tourism models according to the Kairos call, "come and see."
- 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.

5. An inclusive vision of just peace throughout the Middle East

- We reiterate the Kairos Palestine objection to religiously-identified political systems. Trying to make the state a religious state, Jewish or Islamic, suffocates the

state, confines it within narrow limits, and transforms it into a state that practices discrimination and exclusion, preferring one citizen over another.

- With the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches, we call for Al-Quds/Jerusalem to be a shared holy city of two peoples and three faiths. We take seriously the call to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

***We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair.
(2 Corinthians 4.8)***

[1] Other countries represented included Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, England, Germany, Finland, France, India, Ireland, Mauritius, Norway, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Scotland, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, and the United States, among others.

[2] www.kairospalestine.ps

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