



Sabeel-Kairos UK Annual Advocacy Report 2019-2020

2019-2020 has proved to be a very busy year for Sabeel-Kairos in our advocacy work. These have been challenging times to carry out advocacy work, with the total lockdown of the UK due to the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, but despite this we have seen our campaign groups grow and our influence in the churches become stronger. At the same time, we have strengthened our ties with our Palestinian partners, and supported a number of initiatives and advocacy messages coming from them directly this year. Below is a summary of our activities.

1. Investing for Peace – our key campaign.

We have continued to support our 4 denominational campaign groups, all of which have gained more members in the 2019-2020 reporting period. These groups are the backbone of our campaign, writing to Church leaders, meeting with finance officers and senior leaders, taking forward motions/ resolutions to local, regional and national meetings/conferences, and raising awareness amongst their peers about Israel/Palestine. We are also looking at starting up another campaign group in Scotland which will focus on the Scottish denominations. We seek to lead, steer and advise these groups, and offer them connections on the ground in Palestine that they need. We also work with a steering group of organisations that support and endorse the campaign, strategizing and utilizing the support they can give. Those organisations are War on Want, Amos Trust, Pax Christi and Christian Aid.

Here are highlights from each campaign group:

Methodists

Our Methodist campaigners worked tirelessly in autumn 2019 to get Palestine on the agenda for the national Methodist Conference 2020. Several memorials regarding the situation in Palestine, the threat Trump's 'deal of the century' proposed, and the need for the Methodist Church to review their investment policy in light of this were put forward, and 3 of these were accepted and passed by circuit meetings before lockdown. Sadly, the lockdown changed the usual course of the Methodist Conference and it took place as an online event, with only essential business conducted. However, the memorials have been referred to the Methodist Council for consideration and follow up, which is a positive result as the previous year the 2019 memorials we submitted were declined outright. The group are now seeking a meeting with the Methodist Council to speak to them directly before they debate the way to take this forward. As well as the investment work, the group have also



circulated the Palestinian document Cry for Hope, and the letter from Bethlehem clergy regarding annexation to senior leaders in the Methodist Church.

United Reformed Church

Campaigners in our URC group have also worked tirelessly this year to raise awareness about the situation in Palestine, writing to their denominational leaders about annexation, and continuing to push for the Church to adopt morally responsible investment policies. This year they have worked closely with a member of the URC group that went to Palestine in 2019 (as part of a mandate from the 2018 General Synod to understand more about the situation and form recommendations for Conference in the future). Together with Christian Aid, we have also approached the URC's Commitment for Life programme to seek their help in promoting the investing for peace campaign, which received a very positive response and we will be taking this forward in the coming months. In addition, we have had conversations with staff of the URC who are sympathetic to the cause, one of whom would like to work with us to put forward a resolution at the National Youth conference in 2021 regarding the investment policy of the URC. These are new, positive and exciting links that will be followed up closely from here on.

Church of England

The C of E campaign group members continue to address and challenge both the investment policy of the Church regarding Israel and Palestine, and also some of their documents that relate to the theological side of the conflict. In 2019 one of the members successfully put forward a motion to her diocesan synod regarding the plight of Palestinian Christians, and the call for help issued in the 2009 Kairos Palestine document. As this was approved by synod, it is now being considered for inclusion at National General Synod, something that we are watching and following up closely.

Despite having written several times to the Finance board and Ethical Investment Advisory Group, our campaigners have not been provided the opportunity to meet with someone from either of these groups. However, we were approached by the Archbishops office following one of our letter writing campaigns, and finally met with the interfaith advisor who deals with most issues pertaining to Israel and Palestine. We had a productive, 2-hour meeting via zoom in July 2020, and despite some significant differences in our opinions on various issues relating to the Palestinians, we both listened and were listened too. We hope to follow up this meeting in several ways, including asking those with positions in the C of E to hear from our partners in Palestine directly.

Our campaigners have also written letters to the Archbishops office regarding the Palestinian document 'Cry for Hope' (which we received an official reply to, and followed up in our meeting with the interfaith advisor), Trump's 'deal of the century', and annexation. In all of these we have focused on challenging the Church to not only speak out about the injustices in Palestine, but to take practical action too.



Catholic Church

Our Catholic campaign group is led and chaired by our partner Pax Christi, who have supported the Investing for Peace campaign for several years now. Through this partnership we have promoted the campaign by writing articles for their newsletters, and by sending several thousand campaign postcards out through their mailing lists and to supporters. The campaign group also works in the same way as others, with a small core groups of members who write letters, meet with diocesan finances officers, and research and work within their own diocese to raise awareness about the investment issue. At national level we are working with Pax Christi to call on several Bishops to support the campaign and become advocates for it, which is a work in progress. The campaign group also engages with justice and peace groups within the Catholic Church.

2. Supporting, promoting and advocating on messages from our Palestinian partners

This year has been extremely busy for both of our partners, and we are delighted that so many advocacy initiatives have come from them directly.

During lockdown Sabeel Jerusalem have moved their excellent advocacy initiative 'Kumi Now' online, hosting different organisations each week and creating an online community of activists. Our advocacy officer spoke at one of these sessions in June on Morally Responsible Investment, which over 200 people attended. We have also promoted and supported these by listening in and inviting our members to be part of them each week.

Kairos Palestine have worked with the Global Kairos for Justice Coalition (of which we are a member) on a new call to action called Cry for Hope, which was released on July 1st. We have focused on promoting this Call within all of our work, profiling it to our members, on social media, in our communications with our partners, and sending the Call to senior leaders in each of the denominations. We are now moving into the next phase of the project, during which we will be inviting clergy in the UK to engage in theological discussion and dialogue with the Palestinian clergy that wrote and issued Cry for Hope. This project will run throughout the autumn of 2020, into early 2021.

Within the Global Kairos for Justice coalition, we have played a key role in co-chairing two of the sub-groups (campaigns and theology) that meet regularly to coordinate global strategy for action amongst the members. This work has led to several meetings, at which our advocacy officer has spoken, including a European meeting on divestment, and soon to be a global meeting on divestment in the Churches. We continue to spend time with the founders of the Kairos Palestine movement within this, seeking their advice and steer on how we can engage a worldwide audience with the issues facing Palestinian Christians.

3. Other campaigns, statements, etc.



In addition to the campaign above, we have also released our own, and joint statements at significant points in time. During the threat of annexation by Israel, we released two statements/calls to action, our own statement, and a joint statement with 14 other human rights/humanitarian/development agencies. The latter received good media coverage, and our own has been circulated widely by our members to churches/church leaders.

We have also released a statement with PSC, Amnesty, Amos, and Trade Unions calling on public bodies or civil society groups to ensure that they do not either invest in, or procure from companies profiting from the occupation. We were invited to be part of this by PSC because of our Investing for Peace campaign, which they see as having a specific reach and target audience for this statement.

4. Working in coalition

We continue to work closely with other organisations, and have continued to raise the profile of Sabeel-Kairos in 2019-20 within the sector. We take part in regular meetings with over 40 other agencies working on Palestinian human rights, and have released several joint statements with partners within this. This has enabled us to get our name into the mainstream press, and be regarded by others as a valuable and important voice to include. At the same time, we have a special relationship with our partners in the Investing for Peace campaign which has included at times financial support, and the commitment of both their staff time and resources to the campaign. As our campaign enters the next phase we hope to make these links even stronger, and seek to bring more partners on board as we extend our reach into the Churches.

5. Communications

We have continued to give Sabeel-Kairos a voice across as many platforms as possible, including on social media, whilst always serving our core members and supporters in the way that suits them. Covid-19 has made communication by post impossible, but we hope very soon to return to regularly posting out our resources and newsletters, including the Sabeel Jerusalem magazine Cornerstone. We have stepped up our online communication in the absence of postal mailings, and send at least bi-weekly news out to our members via MailChimp, as well as the weekly wave of prayer from Sabeel. Our following on Facebook and twitter has grown, and we will also look to be present on other social media platforms in the coming months.

6. Support to our Sabeel-Kairos Community groups

Our Sabeel-Kairos community groups contain some of our most committed, long-standing and knowledgeable members. Prior to covid-19 we were supporting these groups as they arranged events and sought to raise awareness in their churches/communities. This often



involved speaking at their events, sending resources and advice, advertising the events online for the groups, and seeking to put in touch new members with a local group.

COVID-19 has of course severely restricted the ability of our groups to meet in person, and to organize events. However, we have been thrilled to see so many of them embracing the new way of life, and running their own prayers meeting, webinars, and virtual events online. Wherever possible we have promoted, supported and encouraged our groups in these endeavors. We hope to be able to go back to face to face meetings and events soon, but in the meantime, we encourage any of our groups wanting to try online events to get in touch so we can help/support you.

7. 2020 Conference

It was with some sadness and trepidation that we made the difficult decision to change our 2020 Conference from a face to face event to an online one in May this year. However, we are delighted that we have a fantastic line-up of speakers, representing both our Palestinian partners, as well as the opportunity for our members to engage in worship together, and act for justice. We are thrilled to have so many already registered, and hope for even more leading up to the event! The Conference has (and does each year) take consider time to organise, and our advocacy workers prioritise this over the summer to ensure that the experience is a valued one for our members and offers them opportunity to hear current, relevant and challenging information directly from our partners.

8. Sabeel-Kairos Theology group

The Sabeel-Kairos Theology Group has continued to grow in numbers and influence, under the leadership of Revd Brian Brown, a retired Methodist Minister and anti-Apartheid campaigner in both South Africa and Palestine, and a long-term member and supporter of Sabeel-Kairos.

The theology group held their first day Conference in Scotland in February on anti-Semitism and the IHRA; now they are focusing on Christian Zionism and the confessional statement (status confessionis) issued in the recent Palestinian 'Cry for Hope' call to action (see above). The next significant meeting is on September 23rd when Don Wagner of FOSNA will address the group on the subject of Christian Zionism. For details, or to find out more about this group, please contact Brian on retiredbrowns@yahoo.co.uk