



Sabeel-Kairos UK Annual Advocacy Report: 2020-2021

Foreword

By Charlotte Marshall, Advocacy officer.

We are delighted to offer our members and supporters this review of our 2020-21 advocacy work.

2020-21 has been a difficult year for all due to the continuing coronavirus pandemic. Our partners in Palestine have faced not only the ongoing, brutal occupation which has denied them their basic rights for over 54 years, but also systematic discrimination during the pandemic. Despite this, they have continued to strive to impact their communities and provide a vision of hope for the future for the Palestinian Christian community, and we have sought to amplify their voice here in our UK Churches.

In our UK Advocacy work we are delighted to have had our most successful year so far in our Investing for Peace campaign, welcoming the decisions of two of the major church denominations in the UK not to invest in companies that profit from the occupation. This is the culmination of several years of hard work and determination by our campaign groups, to whom we are extremely grateful and thankful for. We have also seen our campaign recommended as a leading action for the Church to take in a recent report on Israel/Palestine by Christian Aid, which we welcome and support.

This year has also seen us reach into new areas of work, and expand our reach into the Churches. We have welcomed Ruth to our team, who is focussing on getting more under 35s involved in our work. This work was made possible by the generous contributions we received from our members and supporters last year, and we would love to continue to support this work over the coming 12 months!

We hope you enjoy reading our report, and look forward to working with you in the coming months towards justice for all in Palestine/Israel.

1. Investing for Peace campaign:

Below is a summary of the work undertaken in each of our denominational groups, including the successes we have seen in the campaign this year.

Methodist Church:

- Jan 2021: A report issued by the Methodist Council recommends revising the existing investment policy with a view to excluding companies profiting from the occupation from investment.
- May 2021: After engagement with them for several months, the Central Finance Board finally divest from Caterpillar stating both ethical and financial reasons. [Methodists Divest from Caterpillar citing Palestinian Evictions | Sabeel-Kairos](#)



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- June 2021: Methodist conference affirms report by Methodist Council and asks them to revise investment policy by Conference 2022.
- June 2021: Methodist conference response to campaigners' memorials commends Cry for Hope to Methodist Churches for prayerful consideration and study. [Methodist Conference commends Cry for Hope to Churches for prayerful study | Sabeel-Kairos](#)

United Reformed Church:

- 10 resolutions on Israel and Palestine taken to General Assembly 2021
- Revd Dr Munther Isaac addresses General Assembly and speaks about the Churches' role in support and solidarity with the Palestinian people.
- 10 resolutions all pass with overwhelming majority – including 2 that relate to national and regional investment bodies, asking them to screen out investments in companies that directly profit from the occupation. [URC passes multiple resolutions about Israel and Palestine](#)

Church of England:

- New human rights policy released by the EIAG¹ in May 2021. Representatives of the S-K Anglican campaign group met with EIAG secretary and author of the report, and one of the Church Commissioner's staff members to discuss how this policy will impact investments in Palestine/Israel. Engagement with them continues.
- Diocesan Synod Motion on Cry for Hope calling on the Church of England to confront theologies that justify the oppression of the Palestinian people and commit not to invest in companies profiting from the occupation is endorsed by Deanery synod in the Carlisle Diocese. This will be debated at Diocesan Synod in October, and if successful will proceed to General Synod within the next 4 years.

Catholic Church:

- Continuing engagement with the newly formed national investment subcommittee through two of its representatives, including presenting to them our Investing for Peace campaign aims.
- Writing letters to Bishops regarding the use of olive oil from Palestine in Church services, and how this could be encouraged.
- Engagement with the Holy Land coordination committee on their 2020 and 2021 statements following their annual pilgrimage, which highlight the need for 'economic actions'.
- Members of the campaign group continue to press their regional dioceses regarding their investment policies and practices.

¹ Ethical Investment Advisory Group: [EIAG Human Rights - web \(1\).pdf \(churchofengland.org\)](#)



2. Other campaigns:

In addition to our ongoing Investing for Peace campaign, and our support for the wider BDS movement, we have also initiated or taken part in the following campaign actions:

- Campaign letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury regarding the war on Gaza in May 2021. Individual members endorse the letter and send to their own Bishops and the Archbishop's office. [Dear Archbishop Justin: Why are you silent on the suffering in Gaza? | Sabeel-Kairos](#)
- Letter to Bishop Christopher Chessun, head of international affairs in the C of E highlights the arrest, detention and impending trial of Palestinian Christian Layan Nassir² and asks the Church of England to issue a statement of solidarity and support to Layan and her family.
- Save Sheikh Jarrah: we have supported the petition endorsed by our Palestinian partners, and sought to raise awareness in the UK about the forced displacement of Palestinians in East Jerusalem. [Stop Israel's forced expulsions of Palestinians from Jerusalem! \(everyaction.com\)](#)
- Sanctions on Israel: we provided links to the official parliamentary petition calling for sanctions on Israel during the latest war with Gaza, and further advice about how to respond/challenge the government's reply. [Sanctions petition | Sabeel-Kairos](#)

3. Supporting the work of our Partners:

Endorsing and echoing the voice of our partners Sabeel Jerusalem and Kairos Palestine continues to be a priority and important part of our education and campaign work here in the UK. There are two specific initiatives in the last year that we would like to highlight here.

Cry for Hope:

In July 2020 Kairos Palestine and the Global Kairos for Justice coalition issued the document '*Cry for Hope: A call to decisive action. We cannot serve God and the oppression of the Palestinians*'³.

Alongside gathering support and endorsements for the Cry, and the petition that accompanies it, we have sought to raise its profile here in the UK through a series of seminars aimed at church leaders and influencers. These seminars have been hosted by Sabeel-Kairos UK but the main speakers have been the Palestinian theologians, authors and church leaders behind Cry for Hope.

To date we have run 8 seminars, with members from every major denomination attending, and some new contacts within the evangelical/pentecostal and charismatic churches. From the traditional denominations we have seen Bishops, senior leaders from Lambeth Palace, leaders of the Methodist Conference, and Bishops within the Catholic Church attending. All have had the opportunity to hear directly from Palestinians about life under occupation, ask questions, discuss the Cry for Hope, debate theology, challenge and be challenged.

² [Petition - Release Layan Nasir and other Birzeit University students - Change.org](#)

³ [Microsoft Word - Cry for Hope June 1 2020 .docx](#)



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Our work to support the Cry for Hope continues, and we remain an integral and committed part of the Global Kairos for Justice coalition.

Kumi Now:

Sabeel Jerusalem's Kumi Now⁴ initiative entered its second year at the start of the COVID pandemic. It is to their credit that they have adapted this important campaign initiative, moving the Kumi Now content online, and hosting weekly seminars on a Tuesday at 6pm Jerusalem time with excellent speakers and new topics every week. The Kumi Now community are faithful and committed, with many turning up every week to take action on the most pressing issues facing all Palestinians living in an apartheid system.

Our support for Kumi Now has included encouraging members in the UK to attend, advertising the events weekly on our social media sites, highlighting the event and the topic in the Wave of Prayer, and providing the content and speaker for the week focused on Morally Responsible Investment.

Our support for the wider work of Sabeel Jerusalem also continues, including the distribution of Cornerstone magazine, our work with other Friends of Sabeel groups around the world, and sending the weekly wave of prayer to our members.

4. Working in coalition

We continue to be involved with many other organisations and groups working on Palestinian advocacy here in the UK. Together with 40 other like-minded agencies we have issued several statements this year and calls to action, including this - [On the eve of Nakba Day, UK charities urge government and Parliament to uphold the rights and dignity of the Palestinian people as they face ongoing dispossession | Sabeel-Kairos](#) and this - [UK charities statement on the Prime Minister's comments on the International Criminal Court \(ICC\) investigation | Sabeel-Kairos](#). These statements often reach into the mainstream media. At the same time, we have been involved through this coalition with advocacy behind the scenes, meeting with ministers in the UK Government and issuing private letters of concern.

We have also sought to support public protests and rallies, attending 2 in London run by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in the latest war on Gaza (May 2021).

We also continue to work closely with our partners and allies in the Investing for Peace campaign. The most significant development here was the publication of Christian Aid's report 'Where is Palestine? A story of loss, inequality and failure' released on Monday 20th September. The leading recommendation to Churches in this report was for them to support the Investing for Peace campaign, cementing Christian Aid's support and partnership with us in this area.

⁴ [KUMI NOW – Together For Justice](#)



5. Supporting our Regional groups, Kairos Communities, and members

During the last year we have continued to offer remote support (due to the pandemic) to our groups around the UK. Our advocacy officer Phoebe Rison has run several Palestinian cook-a-longs which have been fantastic events, raising vital funds for our work but also providing an important link to the cultural side of Palestine. Despite being on maternity leave, Phoebe has 3 more of these events scheduled in the autumn, and will be looking to offer more opportunities when she returns to work later in the year as well.

Many of our groups have continued to send out regular newsletters, and host online events during the 2020-21 period. We have sought to support this in any way we can, offering our technical services and also by advertising and helping to spread the word about these events. At our annual conference we hosted a workshop for our regional groups and Kairos communities. We hope to use this as an opportunity to create a more connected Sabeel-Kairos community, where communication and support can flow between groups as well as from the centre out. As life (hopefully) returns to face to face events being more possible, we also hope to visit our groups and help them with any events and speakers they may need in 2022 and beyond.

6. Theology

We are delighted to report that our theology group, led by Brian Brown, has continued to meet online and engage in discussion and dialogue on matters throughout 2020-21. Members of the Group continue to receive papers prepared on the themes of Christian Zionism, Israel as an Apartheid Society, Antisemitism and Status Confessionis, but the sharing is not confined to these topics. The latest, by Canon Nicholas Taylor of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, reflects on how the Anglican Communion deals with Christian attitudes to the Holy Land and Christian Zionism in particular.

The Theology Group is also encouraged to be involved in researching and preparing resources for Sabeel-Kairos when requested. Members were recently invited by the Sabeel-Kairos team to respond to a resource for Churches on the theological critique of apartheid, being prepared for the Global Kairos for Justice Coalition.

As the pandemic ensured that no day conference happened in 2020-21, the Sabeel-Kairos Board have been asked to approve the holding of a two-day Residential Conference at St Deinion's (Gladstone Library) near Chester from 15 to 17 March 2022. More details about this will follow in the coming weeks.

7. Social media and communications

We have continued to give Sabeel-Kairos a voice across as many social media platforms as possible. We have a new Instagram account which has 50 followers so far, with the aim of reaching a younger demographic. In the next few months our under 35s engagement officer is going to access some social media training to increase the effectiveness of our posting. We now also use Canva, an online



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design tool, which means that we can easily achieve parity across different platforms by creating a post and sharing it on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. One of our Canva designed posts asking for people to sign a petition for Layan Nasir, a Christian Palestinian student arrested by Israeli authorities, achieved 2, 784 engagements.

8. Under 35s engagement

Our under 35s engagement officer started work in April, and has been networking with churches and other organisations to contact those young people who are already involved in advocacy work for Palestine, as well as those who are new to the whole subject of Israel/Palestine. We held an online Objector film Q & A event for under 35s where Israeli activist, Atalya Ben Abba came to speak about her experience as a conscientious objector. It was an impactful and thought-provoking event.

We have also made good links with young members of the URC who were part of their church's trip to Palestine in 2019, and we are now working with them to put on a Palestinian cook-a-long event to raise awareness amongst the young people in the Eastern URC synod. A couple of young members of the URC are also attending our under 35s seminar at the conference. It is exciting because this is the first time we have held a seminar for this age group at the Sabeel-Kairos conference, and we are looking forward to discussing together how we can spread awareness of the work of Sabeel-Kairos amongst the younger generation in our churches.

Through our networking, our under 35s engagement officer was invited by the Leeds Catholic Justice and Peace commission to record a video about our work for their SPARK justice campaign for young people in the Yorkshire area. When this is published it will be a useful resource for us to share on our new website page specifically for under 35s and on our social media platforms.