

## A RESPONSE TO 'CRY FOR HOPE':

### A CALL TO THE CHURCHES AND THE WCC ASSEMBLY 2022

*Statement from the Sabeel-Kairos Theology Group Consultation held at the Gladstone Library, Hawarden, Flintshire, 15-17 March 2022. Endorsed by Sabeel-Kairos UK.*

**1** We met during the days immediately following the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces on the orders of President Vladimir Putin, recognized by the United Nations as a flagrant breach of international law<sup>1</sup>, and causing millions of Ukrainian families to flee for their lives, cross borders, and add to the ever-growing number of refugees.

**2** We remembered that in the wake of another war in 1948 three-quarters of a million Arab Palestinians (60% of the Arab population) were driven from their homes and became refugees as the State of Israel was born. Although every year their right to return is renewed by the UN, it is ignored with impunity by the Israeli state. Since 1967 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have endured an ongoing violent military occupation, and those living inside Israel are designated as second-class citizens. So, why after all these years are we still here, calling for an end to this seemingly unending denial of human rights?

**3** We gather in response to a letter from Palestinian Christian communities and Church leaders written in 2020, representing Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice and addressed to the Churches of the world. It is headed CRY FOR HOPE: A CALL FOR DECISIVE ACTION<sup>2</sup>, sub-titled 'We cannot serve God and support the oppression of the Palestinian people'. It speaks urgently of a threat to their existence in the land that is called Holy.

**4** The letter points to a *political crisis for Israel*. In its continuing oppression and dispossession of the Palestinian people, Israel is in breach of international law<sup>3</sup>. Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations, notably B'Tselem and Yesh Din, followed subsequently by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International<sup>4</sup>, have recently come to the conclusion that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid against Palestinians. Others are following suit<sup>5</sup>. According to the Rome Statute, apartheid is a crime under international law – a crime against humanity<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2002); articles 5-8. 4th Geneva Convention, article 14.

<sup>2</sup> [www.cryforhope.org](http://www.cryforhope.org)

<sup>3</sup> 4th Geneva Convention articles 27, 33, 39, 49, 50, 53, 55, 56, 58, 59 and 147; UNSC resolutions 242, 476 and 2334; Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 13; UN Charter, article 2(4); International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of Apartheid (1973).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.btselem.org/apartheid>; [The Occupation of the West Bank and the Crime of Apartheid: Legal Opinion - Yesh Din \(yesh-din.org\)](#); [A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution | HRW](#); [Israel's apartheid against Palestinians - Amnesty International](#)

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967: [A\\_HRC\\_49\\_87\\_AdvanceUneditedVersion.docx \(live.com\)](#). Harvard Law School and Addameer Joint Submission to the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel: <http://hrp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/IHRC-Addameer-Submission-to-HRC-COI-Apartheid-in-WB.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Rome Statute, article 7(1), defines the crime of apartheid.

5 As long ago as 1976 Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin warned that continued settlement expansion in the West Bank was like a cancer that, if not stopped, would doom Israel to become an apartheid state<sup>7</sup>. That birth of one sovereign Israel apartheid regime is now a de facto reality. The supposedly temporary occupation of Palestine is seen by today's Israeli leaders to be intentionally permanent. A vastly expanded and illegal 'Land of Israel' State is emerging from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.

6 Within that territory not one Palestinian is entitled to vote as a national of a recognized national state. All Palestinians in Israel are non-nationals, according to the 2018 Israeli Nation State Law, and therefore second-class citizens of a racist regime<sup>8</sup>. Palestinians in East Jerusalem are given permanent residency (which can be revoked) and are denied a national vote despite being in 'annexed territory'. All Palestinians in the illegally occupied West Bank and blockaded Gaza are denied, by Israel and its allies, self-determination within an internationally recognized state of their own.

7 South Africa's apartheid was a nationalist and racist ideology that pursued the total dispossession and domination of one ethnic group of people by another and was implemented by means of overt and institutional violence. This White dispossession of the land, nationality, human rights and freedoms of Black people, together with the state's violation of international law, intentionally sought to ensure that there were no Black South African nationals. The Israeli regime's replication of many of the same violent and dispossessing policies towards the Palestinian people, and its similar pattern of violating international law, has earned this same apartheid designation.

8 The Cry also points to a **major crisis for the Christian Church worldwide**. In Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa, Christians were challenged to confess the faithlessness of many Churches to declare a 'status confessionis', whereby one favoured ethnic group was dominant and acted to the detriment and suffering of the other ethnic group. Palestinian Christians similarly see their situation as a crisis of faith whereby Christ's Gospel of ethnic inclusivity and equality is reduced to one of a God who has favourites; the very being of the Church, the integrity of the Christian faith and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. Those who claim to follow the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth now need to declare that total opposition to apartheid is mandatory. Apartheid is a sin.

9 A powerful voice, exemplified by the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu and confirming of Israel's apartheid status, emanates from South African and Namibian survivors of apartheid. They see the fires of their own apartheid struggle burning as fiercely in today's Palestine and declare that to be a follower of the Way of Jesus is to reject apartheid. There is no middle ground. It is either/or. In regard to Israel-Palestine this places the Church in a **status confessionis** that concerns the very soul of the Church.

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<sup>7</sup> Recording preserved by Dan Patir, Rabin's press secretary, 1976.

<sup>8</sup> Adalah: Analysis of the Nation State Law: [Final 2 pager on the JNSL 27.11.2018 .pdf \(adalah.org\)](#)

**10** Churches are largely silent not only with regard to the disappearance of Palestine but also with the heresy of Christian Zionism which encourages this development. Christian Zionism offers unqualified support to the Israeli regime and is not only heretical but antisemitic. It teaches the end of Judaism, with all Jews being either annihilated or converted to Christianity. Cry for Hope declares: ***'We assert that the Christian support for Zionism as a theology and an ideology which legitimizes the right of one people to deny the human rights of another is incompatible with the Christian faith and a grave misuse of the Bible'***.

**11** As a group of ecumenical Christians from different parts of Britain and Ireland, meeting under the aegis of Sabeel-Kairos, we acknowledge Britain's particular historical role and responsibility in failing to recognize the state of Palestine. The extent of Palestinian suffering is now 'beyond urgent' and demands decisive action. This is not in any sense a 'conflict' between two balanced, competing sides, but is an asymmetrical situation in which the Palestinians are the oppressed. We are called to stand in solidarity with all those, including Jewish voices, who seek justice for all. We therefore issue this urgent call to all Churches throughout Britain and Ireland, at local, regional and national levels, and the World Council of Churches Assembly, to respond in the following ways:

i) Increase **AWARENESS** of the existential threat facing the Palestinian people at the present time. If there is no excuse for silence, there is even less for ignorance. We call on Church leaders as a matter of urgency to use worship and appropriate programmes and projects to educate their congregations in the facts of the present crisis.

ii) Recognize the **TRUTH THAT ISRAEL IS AN APARTHEID REGIME and the grave reality of facts on the ground which demonstrate this truth**. Can we continue to support by our words, actions – or silence – national policies which practise apartheid in its dealings with the Palestinian people? These include the violent dispossession of land for illegal Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, the destruction of thousands of homes, the displacement of families and communities, the denial of nationality and identity, the violation of human rights and a matrix which controls by walls, barriers and check points every aspect of the daily life of Palestinians; a situation not only illegal but criminal under international law – which has continued for 55 years and worsens constantly.

iii) Understand that **WE CANNOT SERVE GOD WITH INTEGRITY WHILE COLLUDING IN THE OPPRESSION OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**. The implications for Churches and Christian communities are extremely serious. Ignorance and indifference make us complicit. They go to the very core of our faith. We cannot be followers of Jesus and support by our words, actions or silence the apartheid policies and practices of the Israeli State. This, in effect, puts us in a **'Confessional crisis'**.

iv) Take **DECISIVE ACTION** in collaboration, wherever possible, with other Churches and Faith Communities by joining the Palestinians in their creative non-violent

resistance. Cry for Hope supports the 2005 Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) until the occupation ends. This provides a framework for economic, cultural, and academic measures, and direct political advocacy, as nonviolent means to end the occupation and oppression:

**a) Boycott** all goods on sale in supermarkets and shops which support the State of Israel in its continuing occupation and theft of land belonging to Palestinian families.

**b) Divest** from all companies involved in profiting from the occupation; engage vigorously with banks which lend to companies profiting from the occupation, calling for the end of such lending; and if these banks lend to the State of Israel, to end such loans immediately. We urge support for the Sabeel-Kairos campaign 'Investing for Peace'<sup>9</sup> and recommend the report 'Don't Buy into occupation'<sup>10</sup>.

**c) Apply Sanctions.** We call on our Churches and individuals to lobby elected representatives, calling on the government to end all trade in either direction, involving arms and military equipment until Israel complies with international law. Palestinians compare the speed with which sanctions have been imposed on Russia for its breach of international law in its war on Ukraine, whilst in Israel/Palestine it has already taken 74 years and counting.

## 12 Conclusion

The authors of 'Cry for Hope' insist, *'The purpose of BDS is not to punish or isolate Israel. It is rather to exert pressure on Israel to comply with international law. We make this call out of concern for the future of both peoples. In the words of Kairos Palestine, our call is rooted in the LOGIC OF LOVE which seeks to liberate both the oppressor and the oppressed, in order to create a new society for all the people of this land'*.

In this Kairos moment of critical opportunity, we join our Palestinian sisters and brothers in their clear call to the churches for decisive action, including the 2022 World Council of Churches General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany.

*'In making this commitment and confession we embrace our membership in the community of the broken bread, the Church, fulfilling its mission to bring the good news of God's gift of love, mercy, compassion and abundant life for all' (Cry for Hope).*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk/category/taking-action/investing-for-peace/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://dontbuyintooccupation.org/>