



Focus:
Palestine
a WCRC Handbook
part 1

This handbook was written in response to *Action 55* of the WCRC at the 2017 General Conference.

Focus: Palestine is created in 3 parts for ease of printing in smaller sections. It is designed for A4 paper but can also be printed on 8.5x11 paper when the “fit to scale” box is checked in the print window. Please print 2-sided copies and recycle your paper.

© 2021 by the authors,
Katherine Cunningham and Noushin Darya Framke

Book Design by Noushin Darya Framke
Focus: Palestine videography by Noushin Darya Framke

Permission is granted to reproduce and distribute this document in whole or in part for non-profit use with proper attribution to the authors.





World Communion
of Reformed Churches

Focus: Palestine

a WCRC Handbook

Part One: Voices and Lenses

Written and Edited
by
Rev. Katherine Cunningham
Noushin Darya Framke



Graffiti on Separation Wall in Bethlehem
photo: Usama Zoughbi

Table of Contents

PART ONE: Voices and Lenses

Prologue

Methodology

Chapter 1

Introduction

Text of *Action 55*, including rationale
Foundational Confessions as Framework:
Accra and Belhar Confession

Chapter 2

The Call of Christians from Palestine

Theological core of this handbook:
Palestinian Christians Bring Their Cries and Hopes
to the Global Church
Call and Commitments of *Action 55*
Documents from the Palestinian Christian Community
Amman Call, NCCOP, *Cry for Hope*
Sabeel
Kairos Palestine / Global Kairos for Justice

Chapter 3

Current Perspectives within Churches

Our Lenses: Global Standpoints in WCRC Member
Churches on Israel/Palestine

Chapter 4

Colonialism and the Endgame of Decolonising

Role of the Church / Doctrine of Discovery
Results of Doctrine of Discovery:
Colonialism
Africa example video
Settler Colonialism
Erasure and Israel/Palestine Example
Decolonization / The Way forward
Two Endgame Example

Chapter 5

Sumud, Resilience and Resistance

Political and Theological Resistance
Theological foundations for BDS
BDS as non-violent resistance
Invisible Resistance: Sumud
Examples of Sumud

Chapter 6

Misleading Ideologies and Theologies
Christian Zionism
Zionism

Chapter 7

Systems of Sin

1. Apartheid
2. Borders and Surveillance
3. Refugees
4. Normalization
5. Problematic Pilgrimage and Israeli control of tourism
6. Violations of human rights and International Law
7. Children
8. Environmental destruction: Gaza

Chapter 8

Jerusalem

Jerusalem as microcosm for systems of sin
Sheikh Jarrah: a microcosm of a microcosm

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Appendices A through G

[VIDEOS - Click here for Focus: Palestine playlist](#)

1. The Occupation Will Survive the Pandemic
2. Meet the Palestinian Christians
3. The Other Side of the Wall
4. Evils of Colonialism
5. What is your name?
6. Is Israel a settler colonial state?
7. Beyond the two-state solution
8. Decolonization is the way out
9. Why BDS?
10. BDS in a global context
11. Culture as Resistance: Sumud
12. Jerusalem Dance Challenge and Palestine
13. Solidarity from around the world

These videos are posted on the WCRC YouTube channel.

Prologue

A Word on Methodology

The General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, meeting in 2017, received a call from members of the Palestinian Christian community to respond to the continuing crisis in their homeland. Heeding that call, a mandate was issued to collect resources and engage in sharing those with a particular focus on how theologies are used to legitimate the continuing oppression of the Palestinian people. That mandate is called *Action 55* and is the foundation for this handbook. One of the outcomes of such collecting, reflecting, and discerning could be what *Action 55* called “prophetic action” within the WCRC.

Action 55 guides the shape, the research, and the theological content of *Focus: Palestine*, which “...affirms that, with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake....”

The work for this volume began in 2018 with researching and collecting the materials, with the intention of also convening an editorial advisory group to work on organizing the resources. That research created the foundation of an archive and is blended into this handbook’s content. We are grateful for that core research and indebted to what was collected and organized.

In early 2021, at the request of the WCRC, we picked up the work on the *Action 55* mandates; we were directed to research at the denominational websites listed in the WCRC membership rolls, focusing primarily on the churches of the global south. That methodology included looking at active websites of member churches of the WCRC in the global south, as well as ecumenical bodies to which member churches belong regionally and globally.

Denominational leaders in regions of the global south were contacted and asked for assistance in being directed to possible materials related to *Action 55*, and that material has also been included. This research yielded a variety of resources and policy statements, mostly examples of the actions of churches towards studying the “facts on the ground,” seeking pathways to justice, freedom, and security for the Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Our research revealed that many of those posted educational resources or statements were in response to engaging with Palestinian Christian partners through webinar presentations, conferences, or pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Videos, press releases, and reports from the WCRC and member churches in various regions globally also speak to *Action 55* concerns, responding to the calls from *Palestine: Kairos Palestine*, *Open Letter* and *Cry for Hope*. Each communication has called for solidarity and action, particularly by global churches. Faith-based movements, such as *Global Kairos for Justice* or *Sabeel* international groups (whose members include advocates in WCRC denominations) are also represented in the research, reflecting those partnership connections.

Most compelling of all are the resources of the theological works, advocacy writings, videos, photos, artwork, and courageous witness of the Palestinian people themselves. Their voices are centered throughout this work, from the residents of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, to the

Palestinian citizens of Israel, and Palestinians in the world diaspora. In conjunction with Christian traditions that the WCRC relates to directly through ecumenical councils, many Palestinian theologians come from the Lutheran and Anglican traditions and represent the closest relatives in the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches. As the membership of the Middle East Council of Churches is broader and includes the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, readers will find voices from those Palestinian Christians are also represented.

Centering the “facts on the ground” and the witness and mission of those Palestinian Christians is part of solidarity, the kind of truth telling that Palestinians have asked of the global churches, including those of this communion. Thus, Palestinian Christians speak to siblings and denominations within the Body of Christ, and those voices are amplified by the voices of Christians from the global south.

We have made every attempt not to change the meaning of writings we have researched and included, even where there has been extensive editing for length. Neither have we attempted to blunt the witness and the call to prophetic, courageous, and even costly solidarity that our Christian siblings have urgently called the churches to enact. We know from our long experience of engaging with the injustices endured for decades by the Palestinians, and from years of advocacy within the Reformed tradition, that centering Palestinian voices is not “balanced.” We respect that there are varied views within the WCRC on what *Action 55* called “the conflict” around this topic, and affirm that those perspectives are held by persons of genuine faith and commitment.

We ask this:

Hear the Palestinian address to the church. Listen to their stories and struggles; see their hope and resilience. Do so by first engaging with the frameworks of the confessions of Accra and Belhar. Discern the call of Micah 6:8 to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God, in the contexts of the Holy Land and its inhabitants. Consider the history of what has taken place there, especially since the United Nations partitioned the land. Explore the impacts of the military occupation that has been in place since 1967. And watch the videos¹, listening to the messages. Search the scriptures carefully.

In particular, try to discern how colonialism, a deeply lived reality among the members and churches of the WCRC, speaks to the witness that Palestinian Christians bring to the world. Look carefully at how scripture is used to justify political actions and ideologies. Is this how the Word of God is to be used in the world? Heed the invitation of the Palestinian churches and fellow Christians: “Come and See.”

And then, “Go and Tell,” and boldly act. It is our hope that this handbook will encourage you in that truth-telling. May it be a pilgrimage of the heart, but even more, a journey into solidarity and justice. Rise up, and move forward on the prophetic steps that *Action 55* points the WCRC towards. It is urgent that empire be confronted and dismantled.

Katherine Cunningham and
Noushin Darya Framke

¹ Videos are connected by live links in this handbook. There are 13 numbered videos created specifically for this handbook, plus several others linked to their host organizations.

Chapter One

Introduction

Palestinian Leaders Speak

WCRC Palestinian Partners with a Message to the Churches

- * A big problem today for a just peace in Palestine, is the lack of courageous leadership in the world.... Many are afraid to speak up for justice in fear of offending Israel, which also is a problem for many churches worldwide.
~Nora Arsenian Carmi from a December 2020 WCC [interview](#) Palestinian Christian peace worker yearns for courageous leaders
- * Justice must lead to peace; inversely, it is the best and only foundation on which peace can be built. Making peace is a mandate from Christ himself.
~Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek, co-founder of the Sabeel Movement, from *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, NY, 2010
- * Moreover, as I have said before, Jesus does not evade conflict. He uses the occasion to communicate new and alternative values of peace and justice in which the oppressor and oppressed can live in harmony.
~Rifat Odeh Kassis, Moderator of Kairos Palestine, from *Kairos for Palestine* Palestine/India: Bady/Alternatives, 2011
- * It is a cry coming from the depths, a cry for justice... [the] words from the prophets are our words.... And in the wilderness of occupation, oppression, and exile, we need the prophets more than ever....
~Jean Zaru, Palestinian Christian leader of the Friends Meeting, Ramallah, from *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008
- * From the point of view of Palestinian Christians, the global church has been part of the problem and have over the years made things worse for Palestinian Christians.... Church leaders in Palestine and the Arab world were forced over the years to issue one statement after another denouncing Christian Zionism.
~ Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, evangelical Palestinian theologian, from *The Other Side of the Wall*
- * Christian Zionism uses our Holy Bible to develop their own unfounded scenarios of injustice and challenging Christ's message of love and justice to all humanity.
~Bishop Munib Younan, Lutheran Bishop Emeritus from Palestine, [Church of Norway: Christian Zionism is "theologically unacceptable"](#), WCC News, October 2020

There Is a Difference between Apartheid and Lockdown

A Word to the World from Palestine During the Pandemic

A video message by Ms. Bisan Mitri, a Palestinian Christian presented at the opening session of the World Communion of Reformed Churches "COVID-19 and Beyond" process, December 2020

[CLICK TO WATCH VIDEO #1:](#)
[MS. BISAN MITRI SPEAKS TO WCRC FROM PALESTINE](#)

Directed toward Justice: The Unity of the Church in Solidarity with Palestinians

Action 55 and the WCRC

The Imperative: “with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake.” ~Action 55, 2017 World Communion of Reformed Churches

As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in... empire. In using the term “empire” we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.

~The Accra Confession

The Call And Commitment to the WCRC in Action 55 by the General Council (2017)

The World Communion of Reformed Churches has urged its more than 225 member churches worldwide to examine their mission, education, and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine in the light of the witness of Palestinian Christians.

2017 WCRC ACTION 55

This year marks 69 years since the creation of the State of Israel. The General Council wishes to reaffirm its commitment to peace and security for the Israeli people and state. The General Council also affirms that the creation of the State of Israel had a significant consequence: the loss of homeland for the Palestinian people, and the creation of three quarters of a million Palestinian refugees, whose numbers now total over six million.

In an open letter to the ecumenical movement published on June 21, 2017, the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine has called the situation “on the verge of catastrophic collapse” declaring that this is the “last chance to achieve a just peace... and to save the Christian presence in this land.” They have appealed to the world church for costly solidarity with them to end their oppression and gain their freedom, through solidarity visits, reviewing theology, economic actions, and support for their freedom to exercise their religious, social and political rights.

Many of us have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears the painful realities of life for Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. We have been witness to the daily, grinding humiliation of women, men and children; the deaths of civilians; the demolition of homes; the confiscation of water resources; the isolation

and ongoing diminution of the Palestinian population of Jerusalem; severe restrictions on freedom of movement, education, commerce, electricity, healthcare, and access to holy places; the unlawful practice of administrative detention, including of children; and the taking of land through the construction of illegal settlements and a separation wall built on Palestinian land. Palestinians who live in the State of Israel, while citizens with the obligations of citizenship, also suffer injustice through discriminatory policies in housing, employment, and more. The re-configuration of Jerusalem in particular jeopardizes the historical place and shared identity of Jerusalem, which is part of its holiness.

We acknowledge and confess that the Christian faith has been used to justify the injustice against the Palestinian people. Any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth. All who suffer share in the groaning of the Holy Spirit for the liberation of all peoples and their joining in one spiritual communion. The ongoing condition of occupation, and the continuing denial of Palestinian rights has cast a shadow over generations of Jewish Israelis who have borne the social, psychological and spiritual burdens of the role of occupier.

Accordingly, the General Council:

Affirms that with respect to the situation of injustice and suffering that exists in Palestine, and the cry of the Palestinian Christian community, that the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake.

Instructs the General Secretary to initiate a programme to:

- Collect studies and materials that speak to the cry of the Palestinian people, and make them available to member churches.
- Undertake study and discernment, using the resources available from member churches and the ecumenical movement, regarding theology that has been employed to legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people, recognizing that such a study might result in the need for prophetic action and a call for a *processus confessionis*.

Instructs the Executive Committee, with the Secretariat, to respond (before the end of 2017) to the letter of June 21, 2017, from the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine indicating what actions can be taken in response to their cry for costly solidarity.

Encourages member churches to examine their mission, education, and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine in light of the witness of Palestinian Christians and to respond as they understand the Reformed communion’s fundamental commitments to human rights and the protections of international law.

Instructs the Executive Committee to encourage and support (with practical help from member churches) delegations to visit the region to connect with the present day Christian community – “the living stones” – of the Holy Land, to witness their situation and express support for their desires for freedom and self-determination.

The resolution adopted at the WCRC General Council stated that the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 had a significant consequence of “the loss of homeland for the Palestinian people, and the creation of 750,000 Palestinian refugees.” It noted that it is also 50 years since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.

“It is time for Israelis and Palestinians to live alongside each other in peace, security and justice,” the resolution stated. “Many of us have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears the painful realities of life for Palestinians.”

In its resolution, the WCRC General Council stated that the Christian faith has been used to justify the injustice against the Palestinian people. It rejected any use of the Bible “to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one person on another.”

The resolution instructed the WCRC Executive Committee to a call from the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine urging solidarity from Christian partners abroad.

~From *Action 55* news story:
[World Protestant body issues solidarity message with Palestinian Christians](#)

Action 55 Affirmations and Mandates

This handbook is shaped by the call of the WCRC Public Witness Report in 2017: “Palestine—an Urgent Issue of Faith for the World Communion.” The introductory paragraphs detail “facts on the ground” that are part of the oppression of the Palestinian people. There is a special emphasis on how Christian faith has been used to justify those conditions, especially the use of the Bible to legitimate imperial political aims and misleading theologies of colonialism.

A summary of the contents of the actions section of *Action 55* focus the core of the handbook:

1. Situations of injustice and suffering exists in Palestine
2. The Palestinian Christian Community calls the church to hear the truth
3. The integrity of faith and praxis is at stake for the church as it confronts Palestinian injustice
4. Mandates that the WCRC initiate a program of witness, study and discernment, “using resources available from member churches and the ecumenical movement on Palestine”
5. Focus particularly on the theology that has been employed to legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people
6. Recognize that such theological study may result in decisions to take prophetic action
7. Encourages WCRC member churches to examine their mission, education and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine in solidarity with Palestinian Christians in responding to the Reformed tradition’s

commitment to fundamental human rights and international law

8. Support and enable delegations to the region and to intentionally connect with the current Christian community there, to witness their situation and to express support for their longing for freedom and self-determination

See news story: [WCRC calls for a just plan for peace](#)

Foundational Confessions from the Reformed Tradition As a Framework for Listening to the Cries of the Palestinian Christians

The core of the Palestinian Christian community’s voices to the entire church are framed in these four documents and in the examples of both the Sabeel and Kairos Palestine/Global Kairos for Justice movements. These are our siblings in Christ who are telling the world, but most especially Christians, that urgent solidarity, theological honesty about misleading and illegitimate use of the Bible and theologies of Zionism and Christian Zionism, racist ideologies reinforced by assigning identities from scripture to residents of Palestine and Israel, and failing to take economic, political, and human rights actions on behalf of the oppressed all constitute sin.

As the World Communion of Reformed Churches reflects upon and discerns its way forward as mandated by *Action 55*, we are also called to use foundational confessions in our discernment and decisions. In this context, the Accra Confession of the WCRC and its partner credal statement from South Africa, the Belhar Confession, are the key guides, along with a careful study of the Bible which removes erroneous narratives and interpretations.

The Accra Confession

The Accra Confession was adopted by the delegates of the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra, Ghana (2004), a predecessor body of the WCRC.

Its central confession is that as Christians we must open our eyes and minds and hearts and read “the signs of the time” in which we find humanity and creation itself:

We have heard that creation continues to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Rom 8:22) We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself. We see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation.

It is based on the theological conviction that the economic and ecological injustices of today’s global economy require the Reformed family to respond as a matter of faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

[Read the Accra Confession Here](#)

[More Resources related on the Accra Confession Here](#)

The Belhar Confession

Read the text of [the Belhar Confession here](#)
(English Translation) September 1986

The Belhar Confession was born in a climate of racial hatred, social upheaval, political turmoil, xenophobia, ideological terrorism, economic exploitation and intense violence. Apartheid, the political system adopted by the South African Government in 1948, mandated racial division that resulted in the creation of unjust laws, an exploitative economy, and rapacious violence against people of color.
~Mark "Ogunwale" Lomax
from "[Why Does the Church Need Belhar](#)"

"The Belhar Confession is a 20th-century confession which comes from a church in Africa and from the southern hemisphere. [Born in the southern African struggle against apartheid](#), it has wide implications beyond its original context. Apartheid was institutionalised in the laws, policies and structures in South Africa. Apartheid ("separate development") is according to Boesak not only a political policy, but constitutes also a pseudo-religious ideology. Apartheid, in its application through racist structures, led to exclusive privileges for the white section of the population at the expense of the blacks. Apartheid created a situation of injustice and oppression, large-scale deportation to racially segregated group areas and caused havoc to family life and suffering to millions of South Africans."
~Rev. Prof. Dr. Mary-Anne Platjies Van Huffel

In 1982 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) called apartheid a heresy and suspended the membership of the white Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. [WARC declared](#) a *status confessionis* concerning apartheid. (*Status confessionis* is a Latin term meaning "that which is foundational for belief and behavior and must be affirmed by professing members of the church.") In the CANAAC region of the WCRC, the frameworks of Accra and Belhar shaped a collective response to both confessions that highlighted their importance for addressing the situation in Palestine and Israel:

While *A Moment of Truth's* recommendations for non-violent economic pressure will be criticized, it is important to see that they focus not on Israel's existence, but on Israel's occupation of Palestine. That 40-year military occupation creates tragedy and brings to mind too much the context of Belhar: the security or separation wall and checkpoints, the Jews-only roads, the inability of Christians to travel to worship in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the settlements encircling

isolated, Bantustan-like pockets of poverty, the seeming collective punishment and then bombing of the biggest pocket, Gaza. We ourselves, especially the US Christians, acknowledge our own temptation to silence and support as taxpayers for actions illegal under international law, destructive of peace, and threatening to the survival of Christianity in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

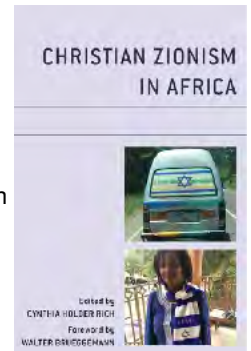
[A Message from the Colloquium on the Accra and Belhar Confessions](#)

Belhar Challenges Erasure of Palestinians

Rev. Dr. Cynthia Holder Rich analyzes the theological wellsprings of Christian Zionism in the African context in her essay, "Race, Power, and Theology: A Christian Appraisal of Christian Zionism in Africa."² Dr. Holder Rich uses the framework of the Belhar Confession to explore the dynamics at work in the African expressions of Christian Zionism. "To understand and accept that disciples of Jesus serve a God who 'is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged' has proven hard for many, particularly Christians who seek to hold power... For Christian Zionist organizations, the choice is to partner with Israel's very powerful government in order to achieve 'Christian' goals, which presents problems for followers of Jesus."

Dr. Holder Rich asserts that for Christians from outside the Middle East to collaborate with a non-African government in its initiatives among Christian churches and organizations remains problematic. These initiatives imperil the very message they aim to bring. "When they do so in Africa, a continent filled with people who have known enslavement, colonialism, and theft, Christian Zionist actors and organizations continue a centuries-long trend of white Christians in Africa coming with goals and agendas unrelated to the people they approach."

The compounding effect of this practice of "Christian" organizations is to reinforce the erasure of the Palestinians, legitimizing the theft and poisoning of their lands and water resources, the violation of Palestinians' rights under international law and the continuing military occupation of the country, including restrictions on movement, identity surveillance and impunity with regard to such behavior by the State of Israel in the international spheres, but most especially in the countries of the global north. All of this is frequently reinforced using scripture as the basis of the actions of such organizations and churches.



Interconnecting Justice...

[This video](#) explains some of the key elements of the [Confession of Belhar](#), which was adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 2014, at the same time that General Assembly also took the action to divest from companies complicit in the oppression of Palestinians and the violation of their rights.

That year, the powerful witness of South African theologians Jerry Pillay and Allan Boesak, along with the urgent call by Palestinian Christian leader Rifat Kassis as an ecumenical delegate, testified to the truth of how both the theological challenge of the Belhar Confession to the global church from the context of apartheid and the call to the churches from Palestinian Christians in their occupation reinforced each other in the contexts of Reformed theology. While the video is contextual to a North American church, it affirms the unity and call to oppose injustice that are at the core of the Confession of Belhar.

²Cynthia Holder Rich, *Christian Zionism in Africa* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 154.

Chapter Two

Palestinian Christians Bring Their Call to the Global Church

Key Documents for Study and Discernment

The Open Letter to the World Council of Churches and *Action 55* in 2017

As the Open Letter to the WCC was the impetus to the Public Witness Report in 2017, the handbook begins with this letter and will consider in turn other key calls from the Palestinian Christian community to their Christian siblings and institutions.

The entire global church has been addressed by the urgency of the “impossible moment” in the language of the [Open Letter](#) to the World Council of Churches composed by the Christian organizations in Palestine in 2017.

In its description of the Open Letter and the follow-up meeting in Beit Sahour in June 2017, the World Council of Churches wrote:

Christians in Palestine need the ecumenical movement more than ever, the letter reflects. [“We need brave women and men who are willing to stand in the forefront. This is no time for shallow diplomacy Christians.”](#)

The letter urges churches to recognize Israel as an apartheid state; condemn the Balfour declaration as unjust; take a clear theological stand against any theology or Christian group that justifies the occupation and privileges one nation over the other based on ethnicity or a covenant; stand against religious extremism; revisit and challenge religious dialogue partners; lead campaigns for church leaders and pilgrims to visit Bethlehem and other Palestinian cities; defend the right of Palestinian Christians to resist the occupation creatively and nonviolently; create lobby groups in defense of Palestinian Christians; and create a strategic program within the WCC to lobby, advocate, and develop active programs towards justice and peace in Palestine and Israel.

Nora Carmi, a Palestinian Christian theologian, one of the creators of the Kairos Palestine document, a civil society worker on justice and peace, as well as a long-time participant in the WCC’s consultations of Palestine, called the church to prophetic, biblical witness from that [Beit Sahour 2017 meeting](#):

This costly discipleship requires the courage to recognize Israel as an Apartheid state, to condemn the Balfour Declaration, to take clear and strong theological stands, to combat religious extremism, to challenge dialogue partners, to direct pilgrimages of justice, to defend the right to resist occupation and injustice, to create lobby groups in defense of Palestinian Christians, and to develop justice and peace in Palestine and Israel.

Taking up that call, *Action 55* was adopted by the General Council of the WCRC.

The organizations that signed on the Open Letter are ecumenical, and many of them have connections to WCRC member churches, international ecumenical partnerships, regional councils of churches or related Christian organizations:

Jerusalem

Arab Catholic Scouts Group
Arab Orthodox Society, Jerusalem
Caritas, Jerusalem
Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees [Middle East Council of Churches]
Greek Catholic Sayedat Al Bishara Association
International Christian Committee
Laitiy Committee in the Holy Land
National Christian Association
Pontifical Mission Palestine
SABEEL, Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center
Seeds of Better life
Union of Arab Orthodox Club, Jerusalem Association–YMCA

Gaza

NECC office

Bethlehem (NCOB) Network of Christian Organizations in **Bethlehem**

The East Jerusalem YMCA /Beit Sahour Branch
The Arab Educational Institute
Holy Land Trust, Bethlehem
Wi’am Center, Bethlehem
Saint Afram Assyrian Society
Holy Land Christians Ecumenical Foundation, Bethlehem
Joint Advocacy Initiative (JAI)
Arab Orthodox Club, Beit Sahour
Arab Orthodox Club, Beit Jala
Arab Orthodox Club, Bethlehem
The Arab Orthodox Charitable Society, Beit Sahour
Bethlehem Bible College
Siraj Center for Holy Land Studies
Alternative Tourism Group, ATG, Beit Sahour Senior Citizen Charitable Society
Environmental Educational Center, Beit Jala
Saint Vincent Charitable Society, Beit Jala
Shepherds’ Children Society, Beit Sahour
Kairos Palestine

The churches and Christian leaders of Palestine have issued two other foundational calls to the global church, the Kairos Palestine document in 2009 and the *Cry for Hope* in 2020.

[CLICK TO WATCH: VIDEO #2](#)

[MEET THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS](#)

Kairos Palestine Document

A Moment Of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering

Kairos Palestine is a Christian Palestinian movement which advocates for ending the Israeli occupation and achieving a just solution to the conflict.

A Moment of Truth (usually referred to as the Kairos Palestine document) is the word of Christian Palestinians to the world about what is happening in Palestine.

From the Kairos Palestine Document:

Our word is a cry of hope, with love, prayer and faith in God. We address it first of all to ourselves and then to all the churches and Christians in the world, asking them to stand against injustice and apartheid, urging them to work for a just peace.

We proclaim our word based on our Christian faith and our sense of Palestinian belonging—a word of faith, hope and love.

We declare that the military occupation of Palestinian land constitutes a sin against God and humanity. Any theology that legitimizes the occupation and justifies crimes perpetrated against the Palestinian people lies far from Christian teachings.

We urge the international community to stand with the Palestinian people in their struggle against oppression, displacement, and apartheid.

We demand that all people, political leaders and decision-makers put pressure on Israel and take legal measures in order to oblige its government to end its oppression and disregard for international law.

We hold a clear position that non-violent resistance to this injustice is a right and duty for all Palestinians, including Christians.

We support Palestinian civil society organizations, international NGOs and religious institutions that call on individuals, companies and states to engage in boycotts, divestment and sanctions against the Israeli occupation.

Everything that happens in our land, everyone who lives there, all the pains and hopes, all the injustice and all the efforts to stop this injustice, are part and parcel of the prayer of the Palestinian Church and the service of all her institutions.



[Read the Kairos Palestine document](#)

The Christian Conference in Asia issued [this report](#) of *Kairos Palestine* when it was released in 2009.

The theological issues raised include:

- Affirms one good and just God, and affirms that everyone's dignity is derived from the dignity of the Almighty One. The document lays out a theology of covenant and land which affirms that "God sent the patriarchs, the prophets, and apostles to this land so that they might carry forth a universal mission to the world.... It is God's land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love." (2.3.1)
 - Develops a rigorous theology of hope in the face of hopelessness which grounds itself in trusting in the promises of Romans 8:31, 35, 36, and 39: "For I am convinced that [nothing] in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God." The document goes on to state boldly, "Hope is the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble, and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us...Hope means not giving in to evil but rather standing up to it and continuing to resist it." (3.2) The Kairos Palestine document locates the mission of the church within the context of Christ's proclamation of "The Kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:21) and the witnessing, steadfast, and active Church which holds fast to being the church which arises in the land of the Resurrection. (3.5)
 - In considering the imperatives and mandates of the commandment to love one another as Christ has loved us, the Kairos Palestine document reiterates that such love is inclusive of both friends and enemies. One of the central, liberating affirmations of Kairos Palestine comes in the section on resistance: "Resistance is the right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as is logic," with the goal of "getting back the land, freedom, dignity and independence." (4.2.3)
- WCRC's *Action 55* requires that the WCRC study the theology that has been employed to legitimise oppression of the Palestinian people. Kairos Palestine, as a call from Palestinian Christians, addresses the use of scripture that continues to legitimize their suffering through theologies of the land, covenant, the identity of God's people, and God's unfolding vision and intentions that silence, erase, ignore and delegitimize the people of Palestine. Kairos Palestine:
- Offers an interpretative lens for the reading of scripture that confronts misleading understandings of the Bible that are used to reinforce the continuing oppression of the Palestinian people and their dispossession of land, forced removal from their homes, and denial of their human rights: "We believe that the Word of God is a living Word, casting a particular light on each period of history, manifesting to Christian believers what God is saying to us here and now. For this reason, it is unacceptable to transform the Word of God into letters of stone that pervert the love of God and His providence in the life of both peoples and individuals. *This is precisely the error in fundamentalist Biblical interpretation that brings us death and destruction when the word of God is petrified and transmitted from generation to generation as a dead letter. This dead letter is used as a weapon in our present history in order to deprive us of our rights in our own land.* (2.2.2) [italics ours]
 - Views the occupation of Palestine as a sin against God and humanity.
 - Condemns the privileging of one people as against another, particular with regard to land as a theological concept enshrined in the misleading theology of Christian Zionism.

Cry for Hope Call

In July 2020, the Kairos Palestine movement issued a renewed call to the Global Church. It was joined by Global Kairos for Justice, the international solidarity movement that stands in partnership and advocacy with Kairos Palestine.

As *Cry for Hope* was launched, the Palestinian and international Christian solidarity community sought the endorsement of the document from the global community of church leaders and organizations. Nearly 200 of those leaders, many with close connections to the churches and ministry of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, endorsed this call so that it carries the weight of Christians in every part of the earth. [Here is a list](#) of those Christian leaders by region:

[Join the Global Kairos Network](#)

Cry for Hope calls the Christian churches to prophetic action with even stronger urgency, building upon the nine points of the Open Letter to the World Council of Churches. Translated into thirteen languages, this document seeks to be read by the entire global church with a prophetic call to take action now, before it is too late for the Christian community of Palestine:

...we realize that it is incumbent upon us as followers of Jesus to take decisive action. The very being of the church, the integrity of the Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. *We declare that support for the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word or deed, is a sin. We assert that Christian support for Zionism as a theology and an ideology that legitimize 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.*

We call upon all Christians and on churches at congregational, denominational, national, and global ecumenical levels to engage in a process of study, reflection and confession concerning the historic and systemic deprivation of the rights of the Palestinian people, and the use of the Bible by many to justify and support this oppression. We call on churches to reflect on how their own traditions can express the sacred duty to uphold the integrity of the church and the Christian faith concerning this issue. *We cannot serve God while remaining silent about the oppression of the Palestinians.*

Read [Cry for Hope: A Call to Decisive Action](#): We Cannot Serve God and the Oppression of the Palestinians.



The Amman Call

Issued at WCC International Peace Conference, "Churches together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East," Amman, Jordan, 18-20 June 2007 (Excerpts)

Amman Imperatives:

Almost sixty years after Christian churches first spoke with one voice about Arab-Israeli peace, forty years since the Christian churches have called for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, Palestinian Christians from Gaza to Jerusalem and to Nazareth, have called out to their brothers and sisters in Christ with this urgent plea: "Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action."

At the heart of the Amman Call is the need for the global church to courageously engage in "costly solidarity" regardless of the reactions or rejections of others. It is a call to face the logic of death and destruction that grips the region. One of its challenges cries to Christians everywhere:

Risk the curses and abuse that will be aimed at you and stand in solidarity with us and with our Palestinian brothers and sisters of all faiths as we defiantly reject the possibility that occupation will continue.

[Read the Amman Call](#)

"The role of the Churches is to heal and to bring all sides to reconciliation. Our belief in God reminds us that all God's children of all religions and political parties are to be respected. We assure the Churches of Palestine and Israel of our prayers, collaboration and resources."

Thus, in Amman, Jordan 18-20 June 2007, churches affirmed the decision of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and launched the "Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum" as an instrument to "catalyze and co-ordinate new and existing church advocacy for peace, aimed at ending the illegal occupation in accordance with UN resolutions, and demonstrate its commitment to inter-religious action for peace and justice that serves all the peoples of the region. This action has been taken in response to three fundamental imperatives that call us to action:

- The ethical and theological imperative for a just peace
- The ecumenical imperative for unity in action
- The Gospel imperative for costly solidarity

The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism is a modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace within Palestine and Israel. The Christian Zionist program provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today. We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation.... [read full statement](#)

August 22, 2006

Signed by Jerusalem Church Leaders:

- His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarchate, Jerusalem
- Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem
- Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East
- Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

Palestinian Christian Organizations and the WCRC

Two Examples: Sabeel and

Kairos Palestine/Global Kairos for Justice

Ecumenical and NGO partnerships are powerful theological and solidarity connections that churches have in the causes of Palestinian justice, freedom and human rights. This interconnectedness facilitates networks of grassroots movements and partnerships, which while they may not have official status within a denomination as an agency/council or responsible for doctrine or policy statements, are nonetheless an advocacy expression of WCRC church members' response to the call from Palestinian Christians. The networks are frequently related to two key ecumenical grassroots Palestinian Christian organizations: Sabeel and Kairos Palestine/Global Kairos for Justice.

Their inclusion in the handbook does not suggest that Sabeel and Kairos Palestine/Global Kairos have the status equal to that of a member church in the WCRC. Nor is it to suggest that their documents, educational materials, or advocacy resources constitute church doctrine or denominational policy. Instead, and as examples of only two of numerous Christian organizations founded by Palestinian Christians with international memberships, Sabeel and Kairos Palestine/Global Kairos for Justice each has a strong ecumenical reach. Each has sought to engage the wider global church around Palestinian justice initiatives. Each has worked intentionally in international contexts and drawn from theology and liberation movements in other regions, particularly from Christians in churches of the global south. The witness of Sabeel and Kairos Palestine has influenced the process by which WCRC member churches have made strong theological statements or solidarity actions. These two organizations also encourage networks of Christians across many geographical and theological landscapes to come together in intentional study and activism, which is a model supported by Reformed theology and is characteristic of the organic functioning of the WCRC itself.

1. Sabeel

Liberation Theology In The Palestinian Context



Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, to promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and peace.

[Sabeel, Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center](#)

Sabeel means “the way” or “the spring” in Arabic, and the catalyst for its founding was the Rev. Naim Ateek, who at the time was the Canon at St. George’s Cathedral in Jerusalem, the seat of the archbishop of [The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem](#).

In 2004, the Sabeel movement issued its Jerusalem Sabeel Document, which stated its founding principles:

In pursuit of peace and out of our faith commitment, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Jerusalem, has formulated a set of principles by which we, as Palestinian Christians, feel a just, secure, and lasting peace can be achieved. ...The people of the region—Palestinians and Israelis—both need and deserve a lasting peace and security. With peace and security in place, bonds of acceptance and friendship can grow. It is no service to either community to promote a peace which flouts international law, ignores justice, and ultimately cannot endure since this will lead to continued bitterness and violence.

~from [Sabeel justice page](#)

Sabeel has its roots in the encounter of Palestinian Christians with scripture, with the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, and theological reflection upon their lived experience as Palestinians and Christians. It arose out of faithful listening—and struggling—with the Bible and the long history of the ways biblical texts have been used to legitimate the oppression of Palestinians. Seeking to ground themselves in the Word of God, but also in response to the urgent pastoral concerns of the people and supporting the non-violent resistance commitments as Christians, a leadership group came together.

As described in a Sabeel [web archive](#):

The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek convened a committee of ten clergy and lay people to explore ways in which this theology could be developed and shared with fellow Palestinian Christians. They decided to host an international conference that would put Palestinian Liberation Theology in the context of other Liberation Theologies from around the world. Several local workshops were held to formulate ideas and prepare people for full participation in the conference.

In March 1990 the conference took place at the Tantor Ecumenical Institute. Local and international theologians developed the themes of the conference: Palestinian Reality; Palestinian Christian Identity; Power, Justice, and the Bible; Women, Faith, and the Intifada; and International Responses to the Quest for Palestinian Theology.

Sabeel is not aligned with any political party, nor is it affiliated with specific denominations. It is broadly ecumenical,

international, and fosters strong inter-faith connections. Rev. Dr. Ateek speaks of the birth of Sabeel as the hand-in-hand mutuality of a theology of liberation and a liberation of theology. “Once we have a vision of the liberator Christ, we have to critique any theology that silences the people of God in the face of evil.”³

The Sabeel movement has also fostered a Friends of Sabeel international movement that has official partners among the World Communion of Reformed Church members. Friends of Sabeel chapters are found in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Ireland, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia.

The international Christian community, in partnership with the leadership of Sabeel, has created an awareness and advocacy program called focuses on organizations within Palestine and globally committed to inclusivity:

Everyone is welcome to join the movement; justice: based on international law, ending the occupation (including Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem), the right of return, and equal rights for all citizens of Israel; and nonviolent resistance: a commitment to using nonviolence as the only form of resistance.

2. Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice



Kairos Palestine, the most extensive Palestinian Christian ecumenical non-violent movement, is based on *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth*, launched in 2009, affirming that the Palestinian Christians are part and parcel of the Palestinian nation, calling for peace to end all suffering in the Holy Land by laboring for justice, hope, and love, embraced by the Christian community, signed by all historically recognized Palestinian Christian organizations, and endorsed by the heads of churches in Jerusalem.

At the conclusion of *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth*, its authors delivered this final message:

The initiators of this document have been working on it for more than a year, in prayer and discussion, guided by their faith in God and their love for their people, accepting advice from many friends: Palestinians, Arabs and those from the wider international community. We are grateful to our friends for their solidarity with us.

Video of the 2009 launch of [Kairos Palestine Launch in Bethlehem](#) (Arabic) with Palestinians and representatives of the international solidarity community in attendance.

As Palestinian Christians we hope that this document will provide the turning point to focus the efforts of all peace-loving peoples in the world, especially our Christian sisters and brothers. We hope also that it will be welcomed positively and will receive strong support, as was the South Africa Kairos document launched in 1985, which at that time proved to be a tool in the struggle against oppression and occupation. We believe that liberation from occupation is in the interest of all peoples in the region because the problem is not just a political one, but one in which human beings are destroyed.

Beginning with the launch, a Kairos Palestine international movement of education, advocacy, and activism for justice, human rights and the rule of international law began, focused primarily in Christian churches and grassroots networks, but also in interfaith and civil society partnerships. The board of Kairos Palestine centered the leadership and direction of Palestinian Christians for the movement, who then became catalysts globally as Kairos Palestine took root. *A Moment of Truth* specifically asked the global church to repent and “revisit fundamentalist positions that support certain unjust political options” with regard to the Palestinian people, including the weaponizing of scripture against the Palestinians and their call for justice.

Over the next ten years, the global partnerships of Kairos Palestine and specific Kairos Palestine movements in international contexts grew, as networks and denominations, many of them within the membership of the WCRC, sought to study, promote, and implement the call found in the document. Some WCRC leaders have remained active partners in the Kairos movement, in solidarity with both Kairos Palestine members and those churches which have become active in the global expression. (A [map of global Kairos movements](#) shows the international reach of these affiliated networks.)

At the [tenth anniversary commemoration](#) of *A Moment of Truth*, the leadership of Kairos Palestine traced its roots to several important witnesses to resistance in the face of oppression and violation of human rights, including the confession of the Reformed tradition, the Barmen Declaration. In [Kairos Palestine: Ten Years of Prophetic Voice](#), Palestinian leaders made connections to the important thread of theological declarations in times of oppression:

Also referred to as *Kairos Palestine*, the profoundly theological document —grounded in the Biblical texts— is a bold, prophetic call naming Palestinian realities as they are and describing life as God has purposed it. This ecumenical confession of faith and call to action stands alongside Christian confessions written in other times of crisis, such as the rise of Nazism (The Barmen Declaration, 1934), in the midst of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (Letter from the Birmingham Jail, 1963), and during the struggle to end South African Apartheid (Kairos South Africa Document, 1985).

Over the years, the document and its authors, while demonized by some, have been gratefully embraced by many around the world. In addition to educators on college and seminary campuses, persons in other settings of occupation, distress, poverty, and marginalization have embraced what is now referred to as Kairos Theology. In turn, the document and its supporters are nurturing a growing international movement, Global Kairos.

The [vision for a Global Kairos movement](#) emerged at a conference in 2011. The conference was attended by representatives of churches and institutions from more than twenty countries. The Bethlehem Call, sent out at the end of the conference reiterated the urgent calls of the Kairos Palestine document *Moment of Truth* and asked for a comprehensive boycott and other economic measures as one of the non-violent tools to end the Israeli apartheid system.

³ Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 12.

Today Kairos movements exist in many countries in the Global South as well as in the Global North. The international movement is integrated into a global committee in which Kairos Palestine plays the significant role of facilitating and coordinating the various committees' tasks of looking at theological and political rhetoric, exchanging information, unifying advocacy strategies, and suggesting activities that take into consideration the specificity of each country deriving from the Kairos concept of acting now for justice. In 2019, at the tenth anniversary of the Kairos Palestine document and movement, the international solidarity movements agreed to create a more integrated partnership, [Global Kairos for Justice](#).

In July 2020, *Kairos Palestine* and Global Kairos for Justice jointly issued the [Cry For Hope](#). Over 400 theologians and secular activists from 40 countries have signed endorsements of the call found in *Cry for Hope*: "We cannot serve God while remaining silent about the oppression of the Palestinians."

Global Kairos for Justice, a community of human rights advocates—Palestinian Christians, their friends and supporters around the world—released "*Cry for Hope: A Decisive Call for Action*," asking [Christian supporters](#) to sign onto the pledge and take actions to end Israel's occupation.

Among the [endorsements](#) for *Cry for Hope* is this one from the then General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches:

The Middle East Council of Churches has always been in support of the Palestinian cause, today even more so. The Kairos Document *Cry for Hope* is our cry for Justice and, therefore, we sign in conviction under this petition as an institution representing all the Churches in the region. Our struggle for Justice and Rights will never cease, it is our *raison d'être* as Christians, the pursuit of and establishment of Justice. Peace without Justice is inconceivable. ~Dr. Souraya Bechealany

Cry for Hope outlines clearly [seven actions](#) to end the oppression of the Palestinian people. For a further description of the international theological and advocacy support for *Cry for Hope* and Global Kairos for Justice, [please read this article](#)⁴ written by the Rev. Jeff Wright, a member of the Disciples of Christ, a WCRC member church.

See more of the statement in chapter 5, page 44.



Dangerous Memory and Hope for the Future

"All Kairos movements emerge from sites of grave injustice and deep pain. Every Kairos document is a cry to God and to the world."

~ from Kairos [South Africa] 30th Anniversary Statement, *Voices from the South*, Karibu Foundation Newsletter August 2015

In our listening to one another, we found that the context of suffering and pain created by Israel's oppression of Palestine contains all aspects of empire. Palestine is therefore a microcosm of global empire, a critical site of reflection that can bring experiences in other locales into sharper focus. Palestine does not eclipse other situations around the globe but instead intensifies the need for greater interconnection and mutual engagement.

All Kairos movements emerge from sites of grave injustice and deep pain. Every Kairos document is a cry to God and to the world. We confess, however, that we have served two masters and preached a gospel that requires nothing of the rich young ruler, even as we build empire on the widow's mite. We recognize that we and our church institutions have often closed our ears to our siblings' cries and drowned them out. In many cases, very little action has followed. The church has often been ambiguous and cautious in its response to human suffering.



⁴ Jeff Wright, "[Palestinian Christians Issue a Cry for Hope, to End 'Exclusivity and Apartheid'](#)," July 30, 2020, *Mondoweiss*.

Chapter Three

Current Perspectives within Churches

Our Lenses: Global Standpoints in WCRC Member Churches

*This is what the Lord says: I have heard your prayers.
I have seen your tears. I will heal you.*
~2 Kings 20:5

- What lenses are being used to focus on Palestine and Israel?
- What are the authentic ambiguities related to suffering and solidarity with victims of the systems of empire?

At the 2017 assembly that adopted *Action 55*, the WCRC emphasized the cry of the Palestinians, the urgent call of the Palestinian Church to the churches of the globe, and the role that the church must take up. It instructed the WCRC secretariat in section 2 to:

collect studies and materials that speak to the cry of the Palestinian people, and try to transform the conflict to make it a just and peaceful society....

In the call from the [coalition of Palestinian Christian organizations](#), which forms part of WCRC'S *Action 55*, this urgency was lifted up:

We stand facing the impossible, but we have not lost hope, since as followers of the Risen One, we are the people of hope. However, we need you and we need you now more than ever. We need your costly solidarity. We need brave women and men who are willing to stand in the forefront. This is no time for shallow diplomacy Christians.

Action 55 directs the World Communion of Reformed Churches to heed those cries and to stand in solidarity with all Palestinians who are part of the originating family of Jesus and the *ekklesia* (assembly or gathering) of first believers in the fellowship woven by and in Jesus that became Christianity. These first followers in the area of Palestine were the People of the Way, the way Jesus had revealed, reconciling the world to himself and each other. They carried on his ministry. They held and preached the “dangerous memory” of his crucifixion and resurrection, of his gospel. On Pentecost, the Book of Acts tells the church, the descent of the Holy Spirit included many languages of the regions of the Mediterranean and West Asia, including the language of Arabs (Acts 2:8-11).

As Palestinian Christians remind visitors to the places of Jesus' life or other holy sites from the biblical writings, those places become the ancient stones of faith-filled memory. These stones belong to a cherished past. That is why Christians from around the world make a pilgrimage to the “Holy Land.” There is another truth to which global Christians need to honor as well.

The Palestinian Christians in all their vibrant diversity are the Living Stones of the first Christians. They are the heirs of those first disciples who followed Jesus, the Palestinian rabbi.



A shepherd with his flock in the West Bank
Photo: Franke

Without international Christian awareness and solidarity, the indigenous Christian Church in Palestine and Israel may cease to exist.

It is critical to emphasize that in responding to the cries for freedom, upholding of human rights and humanitarian law, seeking just peace and standing with Palestinian Christians in particular does not elevate their struggle above others in the human family. With oppressed communities globally, Palestinians experience their history and experiences as woven into those wider calls to prophetic action and costly solidarity. The *Kairos Palestine* document affirms:

We say to our Christian brothers and sisters: This is a time for repentance. Repentance brings us back into the communion of love with everyone who suffers, the prisoners, the wounded, those afflicted with temporary or permanent handicaps, the children who cannot live their childhood and each one who mourns a dear one. (5.2)

The call of the Palestinian churches aligns with Reformed confessions and praxis.

However, as *Action 55* aligns with the *Accra Confession* that in the case of the Palestinian cry for justice and solidarity, “the integrity of Christian faith and praxis is at stake.”

In his foundational paper on confession for the process of Discerning, Confessing and Witnessing in a Time of Covid-19 and Beyond, Dr. Allan Boesak writes that the communion of the church

is to be directed toward the sake of justice. The unity that the Church is called into is the unity of and for the sake of the oppressed and the marginalized of the world. It is a unity that has its heart in the de-centering of illegitimate power and drawing the focus to the margins.

This unity can be manifested prophetically responding to the Palestinian context expressed in the challenge and cry of the Palestinian Church to the WCRC. Those cries focus the lens of the realities of the Palestinian injustice through which the church also sees the multiple and escalating forms of global oppression.

At the same time, the “facts on the ground” require that the truth of the history of Palestine and of Zionism, especially the creation of the modern State of Israel and its continuing colonial project, be put before the Church unequivocally and prophetically.

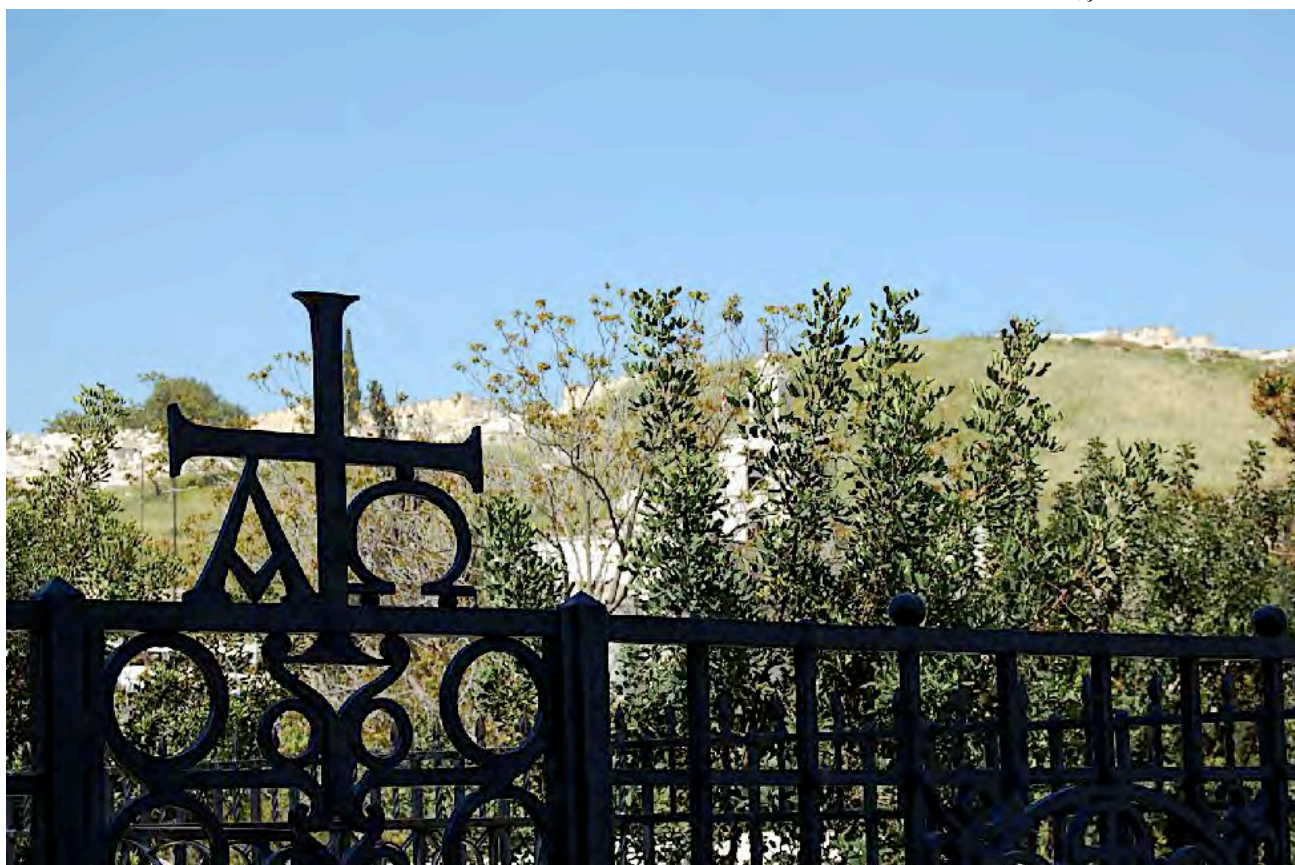
What lenses do we use?

Begin with the diversity of perspectives within the WCRC.

This section of the handbook begins with an acknowledgment that the member communions of the World Communion of Reformed Churches may not share a unified perspective on the political, geographical, social, economic, human rights, and religious conditions that form the framework of what encompasses the term the “Palestinian and Israeli conflict.” The lenses vary, and frequently are part of differing understandings of biblical interpretation and how that applies to social and political realities.

But the unity of the church that Dr. Boesak places before the WCRC in the confession paper calls us to the table to ask how this “conflict” reveals questions of “illegitimate power” and how the churches are to be directed towards the sake of justice.

Gate at the Garden of Gethsemane, Jerusalem. Photo: Framke



The Founding of the State of Israel: Some European Reformed Churches Clarify Their Theology

In 2001, the [Leuenberg Fellowship of European Reformed Churches](#) created a foundational statement that theologically framed the relationship of Jews and Christians in scriptural and historical contexts. Entitled “Church and Israel: A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews,” this document also addressed the political issues around the founding of the State of Israel and very clearly separated it from biblical and theological understandings of Israel as “people of God.”

2.4 The question whether the founding and existence of the state of Israel also has theological significance for Christians is viewed differently by the churches and remains a challenge for them. In this connection, any direct political justification based on the biblical promises of the land must be refuted. Similarly, all interpretations which consider these promises to be outdated in the light of the Christian faith must be rejected. The way in which Christians see the election of Israel as the people of God must under no circumstances result in religious justification for the oppression of political, ethnic or religious minorities. [Church and Israel: A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews](#)

Dar al-Kalima School, Bethlehem. Photo: Framke



Addressing “the Conflict” by Member Churches of the WCRC

How would you or your church or regional ecumenical body describe its standpoints on Palestine and Israel? Having this discussion is critical as the WCRC moves forward with responding to the mandates of *Action 55*. Here are a few standpoints to consider, and there will be others your faith community would speak out. Those are words that need to be said and heard in our ecumenical communion.

The global church has paid attention to the “conflict” of Israel and Palestine since the Partition of Palestine on November 29, 1947, through the vote on Resolution 181 by the United Nations and the declaration of statehood by Israel on May 14, 1948.

For the global Jewish community of post-Holocaust WW II these actions are regarded as the establishment of a homeland and a sanctuary from oppression and genocide.

For Palestinians, however, these dates are the embodiment of their loss and marginalization. It is called the Nakba, which in Arabic means “the catastrophe,” and marks the displacement, dispossession, and dispersal of the Palestinian people.

This history is often referred to as a “conflict” and while there are many issues that include settler colonialism, ethnic cleansing, violations of international law, and other terms that might also describe that history, we will begin with “conflict” as one term that applies to the situation.

The WCRC secretariat was instructed to collect studies and materials that speak to the cry of the Palestinian people, and try to transform the conflict to make it a just and peaceful society, making them available to member churches.

As with the call to listen to the cries of the Palestinians to the church, what does it mean for the member churches of the WCRC to be faithful to trying to transform the conflict to make a just and peaceful society? It should be argued that while this transformation focuses on Israel and Palestine, such actions to try to transform the conflict have profound resonances for the justice and peace of all human communities.

This is but one way in which the “conflict” in Palestine and Israel is a portal into global experiences of injustice, violence, and greed, what Boesak’s foundational paper for the WCRC discernment process calls the “whole complex of crises upon us today. A complex system of dominant and dominating power coalescing to what we dare to name as global apartheid.”

Palestinians themselves, Christian, Muslim and secular, more frequently use terms such as settler colonialism, ethnic cleansing, persecution, apartheid, religious nationalism, military occupation, supremacy.

Other WCRC churches have, for example, clarified that the situation goes beyond “conflict.” [The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa in 2016 declared:](#)

We recognize that the Palestinian struggle is not simply a conflict, but an asymmetric struggle between an oppressor and the oppressed. The oppression entails a decades’ long institutionalized discrimination against Palestinians in the occupied territories of Palestine and also against those within Israel and those in the diaspora who are not allowed by Israel to return.

The churches of the WCRC must be willing to confront the language, the actions, the excuses of Empire, and as with all indigenous peoples, hear the Palestinian voices that have been silenced by international political and religious discourse and policies.

Churches Respond: Studying and Reflecting Together

As denominations, ecumenical councils, networks, and local congregations have studied the range of documents from the Palestinian Christians and the wider communities of both Palestine and Israel, important gatherings have taken place across the globe. Many of those gatherings have been ecumenical and interfaith. Some have produced statements. Other churches have created networks of Christians who are committed to education, advocacy on theological and social witness actions, and publishing resources. (e.g. theIPMN.org) Others have reached into their contextual Jewish communities, or to Israelis, to conduct dialogs and joint advocacy actions and statements. Sabeel and Kairos Palestine (see Chapter 2) have provided generous leadership at these conferences, webinars, and in crafting position documents.



Cross carving in the Cave of St. Jerome, underneath Church of St. Catherine, Bethlehem. Photo: Framke

Resources available digitally are found in the appendices to this handbook. A few of those actions are highlighted here:

- An [ecumenical conference](#) sponsored by the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College, the Church of South India and the Indian Solidarity Network – Palestine featured a presentation by one of the writers of *A Moment of Truth*, Father Jamal Khader.
- A [delegation of the National Council of Churches in Korea](#) made a pilgrimage to Palestine, intentionally meeting with Palestinian Christians and engaging in a “Come and See” trip, as requested by Palestinian church partners.
- The [Iona Community Israel Palestine statement](#) (UK: Church of Scotland network) in response to Church of Scotland study papers, and [condemning the Balfour Declaration](#).
- The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) [issued a strong, clear statement in support of the non-violent Palestinian struggle](#), including the danger of Christian Zionism. This was the first church in South Africa to commit to BDS. Other South African churches followed in that commitment. In 2019, [a group of South African Christian leaders and African American Christian leaders visited Palestine and Israel](#) in a joint pilgrimage. This pilgrimage used the lenses of racism, slavery, systemic violence, and apartheid, as well as their deeply rooted faith to understand the situations they observed. At the conclusion of their journey these leaders issued a statement of recognition and repentance through the South African Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches in the US. It stated in part:

Based on our own histories and struggles as South Africans and African Americans, we are keenly aware of the need to preserve the option of utilizing economic pressure as a means of bringing recalcitrant dominant forces to the negotiating table. As disciples of the One who died that we all may have life, “and have it abundantly”; we seek to stand in the gap between justice and injustice. **We seek to stand in response to the One whose character is to hear the cry of the oppressed.** However, we recognize that many of us have been uninformed, and others of us have been quite aware of the grim situation in this land, and we have been silent and turned a blind eye. **We admit that silence in the face of injustice is complicity.** Indeed, there were many Christians that were silent and closed their ears against the sound of the deadly apartheid jackboot in the lives of South African blacks. There were whole communities of Christians who not only condoned the untold dehumanization of people through slavery, but who thrived on that evil, and their slavery-sourced head-start has become the silent normal of today’s social and economic landscape of the world. Communities and neighborhoods in Europe were silent and complicit to the horror of the Holocaust.

We shall not and cannot be silent, for as the Lord says through Isaiah: He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm brought him victory, and his righteousness upheld him. Isaiah 59:16 (NRSV)

We raise our collective hand to be the extension of that arm, through which God’s salvation and righteousness shall be realized even in this troubled land, and “proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor!”

[emphasis ours.]

Critiquing Some Inherent Assumptions about God's Covenant

Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, a Palestinian theologian, academic dean at Bethlehem Bible College, and pastor at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, has served as one of the key voices of education and advocacy within the World Communion of Reformed Churches and its member churches. Dr. Isaac's book, *The Other Side of the Wall*, which might well be used as a foundational study, invites us to listen to Palestinians themselves.

Dr. Isaac points to how Christians frequently assume that God's covenant with Abraham and the promises made in Genesis are still in effect now. In this belief, the land belongs to Jewish people by religious and historical rights. Dr. Isaac writes when it comes to Christians and Israel, these following beliefs capture the main theological presuppositions that Christians have regarding Israel:

- The covenant of Abraham, and the promises related to it, continues with the Jewish people today and by association with the State of Israel.
- The Jewish people today are the descendants of Abraham and the continuation of biblical Israel.
- The creation of Israel in 1948 was a divine act, a fulfillment of prophecy, and/or a sign of God's faithfulness to the Jewish people.
- Christians are called to support Israel and the Jewish people.
- If you bless Israel, God will bless you. If you stand against Israel, God will curse you (they base this on Gen 12:1-3).
- The historical land of Palestine belongs to the Jewish people as an eternal possession. The Jewish people have a divine right to the Promised Land.

[CLICK TO WATCH VIDEO #3:
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL
REV. DR. MUNTHUR ISAAC](#)

Palestinian Christians have carefully studied all the Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts related to the biblical Israel and the Land. They engage in this study as residents of that land which is called the Holy Land. Many of them have roots which go back hundreds—or even thousands—of years. As faithful Christians and residents of the entire region, they come to a different perspective. This is taken up in more depth in chapter 6 which is on Christian Zionism, Zionism, and misleading theologies.

When one considers in depth the theological positions and attitudes of Christians toward Israel, it becomes apparent that these views *remain silent on Palestinian inhabitants of the land*. ~Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall* [Emphasis ours]

[A posting](#) from the Mennonite Central Committee, a global Peace Church, emphasizes the originating role of Palestinian Christians in the history of Christianity:

Palestinian Christians are keenly aware of their precarious situation in the land where Jesus lived and died. For them it matters greatly whether fellow Christians believe that all people, including Palestinians, should be counted as citizens in the land. "You are Christians because of us. We were Christians long before you were," is the message Ashraf Tannous, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Beit Sahour, has for the worldwide church. "And now, we need your support. Not in money, but in prayer, in moral support and in telling our story."

An article⁵ from NBC News outlines how Palestinian Christian leaders regard the discounting and disregard for the Palestinian community because of the political and religious power of evangelical groups, particularly from the U.S. Ms. Rudaina Isaac, a member at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, puts it this way: "If we are sisters and brothers in Christ—they should understand," she says. "They want Jews to control this land, but Christ came for all the nations."

Pastor Tannous and Ms. Isaac are part of the Lutheran Ecumenical Network that is among the closest partnerships that the WCRC has in the West Bank in Palestine.

If the creation of Israel was a sign of God's faithfulness to the Jewish people, then what kind of a sign is it to the Palestinian people, especially the Palestinian Christians who remain part of the original Christian community founded by Jesus and his followers?

⁵ "Holy Land Christians feel abandoned by U.S. evangelicals," NBC News, May 5, 2018.

Other Lenses Used as Frameworks for Analysis

Other lenses are also used by Christians as perspectives of how the Christian Churches should respond to the cries of the Palestinians. Those perspectives include:

- The State of Israel came into being as a shelter for victims of violence and displaced persons. Modern Israel's genesis came as part of a commitment from the United Nations to create a homeland in a post-Holocaust world that would welcome and protect Jews. In this context, support for Israel is viewed as part of a call to confront global antisemitism.

The life of Judaism today is still marked by the Shoah, even after more than fifty years. The Shoah constitutes a lasting challenge to the churches and their theology. It is a task for all the churches in Europe, including those whose members did not participate in the Shoah. The Shoah continues to demand permanent theological self-examination and renewal; it compels us to investigate the causes of the hatred of Jews which repeatedly breaks out anew and of the anti-Semitism which is still found even today. This self-examination must demonstrate willingness and readiness for penitence and conversion. (1.4)

[Church and Israel: A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews](#)
- Humanitarian aid and spiritual support from global churches and NGOs for the residents of Palestine and Israel, especially for the Christian community, while the Palestinians and Israelis work out a just peace is the important non-political strategy for the global Christian community. A number of the aid-granting churches or organizations place restrictions on the churches, schools, and other groups receiving the aid not to support certain forms of non-violent resistance that Palestinian Christians have committed to.
- Other Christian churches in the WCRC see the situation in Palestine and Israel as a form of global apartheid. Confronting apartheid as defined in international law and applying that to the continuing military and political occupation of Palestine is but one aspect of the naming of the Palestine-Israel situation as apartheid.
- Framing the current situation as a struggle against [“global apartheid which includes socio-economic exploitation and inequalities, political and social exclusion, racial and ethnic discrimination, as well as gender injustice and heteronormative oppression,”](#) [Dr. Allan] Boesak turned to John Calvin for insights.

“Calvin understood that full humanity, that is, meaningful life as free children of God endowed with inalienable rights to worthiness, justice, equity, having choices, and dignity, cannot be realized while people remain in the chains of social hesitation, economic deprivation and political ambiguity. It requires freedom,” said Boesak.
- This standpoint draws on the language of both the Accra and Belhar Confessions within the WCRC:

“We reject any claim of economic, political and military empire which subverts God’s sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God’s just rule.” (Accra Confession, 19)

- In its 2021 report, Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem issued a paper, entitled *This Is Apartheid*, calling Israel a regime of Jewish supremacy. See full [text here](#).
- There is a growing number of churches within the WCRC that regard the situation in Palestine and Israel as “settler colonialism,” socio-cide, and forms of “ethnic cleansing.” These church communities connect the colonial history to the conditions of apartheid, but also draw on the similarities to the forms of colonial domination that has been part of the colonizing history by northern empires of the lands in the southern regions of the globe, indigenous lands and communities in North America and Europe, and in the colonial history of slavery, dispossession, and forced displacement.
- In its treatment of prisoners currently in “security” prison, the State of Israel has refused to implement World Health Organization and other leading medical authorities’ recommendations about the health and safety of persons. The Indo-Palestine Solidarity Network (IPSN) published this analysis of the conditions which are part of what some call medical apartheid:

IPSN was shocked when we heard the news that Israel’s Supreme Court had ruled that Palestinians held in prison are no different than family members or flat mates living in same home. [The Israel’s Supreme Court ruling that Palestinian prisoners have no right to social distancing and, hence, protection against coronavirus smacks of utter cruelty and is in violation of elementary humanitarian standards....](#) We have been following the arguments of Adalah, the independent human rights organization and legal center in the case. In a statement released following the ruling, Adalah slammed the court for accepting the rather absurd narrative presented to it by Israeli authorities that Covid-19 social distancing policies—essential for everyone else—are not relevant to the Palestinian “security prisoners” it holds behind bars. [IPSN is a growing network of like-minded people drawn from all parts of the country committed to justice and freedom for Palestine. IPSN is globally linked through thousands of Palestinian Christians and people of other faiths.]
- These churches and networks confess to the role that the church has played in the forces of empire. In the working paper on confession written by Dr. Allen Boesak⁶, he lays before the WCRC this condition of colonialism and empire:

We speak much against Empire, but we are also churches that often act as empire, which... we identified as global apartheid; in some contexts, the national Church has sided with imperial designs. We are no longer a minority who is being hunted down by Empire, but the church today is Empire. We are powerful and are responsible for much exclusionary violence around the world.

⁶ See Appendix C for Dr. Boesak’s paper.

Often the most powerful voices of telling the truth about the “facts on the ground in Palestine and Israel” come through journalism and other forms of media. Michelle Alexander, an African-American civil rights advocate and visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, is best known for her 2010 book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. In a column in the New York Times entitled “[Time to Break the Silence on Palestine](#),” Alexander drew upon the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, from whom many freedom and non-violent resistance movements in the global churches draw inspiration. She wrote:

Reading [King’s speech at Riverside](#) more than 50 years later, I am left with little doubt that his teachings and message require us to speak out passionately against the human rights crisis in Israel-Palestine, despite the risks and despite the complexity of the issues...

And so, if we are to honor King’s message and not merely the man, we must condemn Israel’s actions: unrelenting violations of international law, continued occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, home demolitions and land confiscations. We must cry out at the treatment of Palestinians at checkpoints, the routine searches of their homes and restrictions on their movements, and the severely limited access to decent housing, schools, food, hospitals and water that many of them face...

We must not tolerate Israel’s refusal even to discuss the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, as prescribed by United Nations resolutions...

And finally, we must, with as much courage and conviction as we can muster, speak out against the system of legal discrimination that exists inside Israel, a system complete with, according to [Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel](#), more than 50 laws that discriminate against Palestinians....⁷

If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.

-Archbishop Desmond Tutu

ISRAEL CONTROLS THE LAND, AIR AND SEA

Today, Israeli authorities maintain a single regime of control over the borders, airspace, population registry and economic activity of the territories of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.



VISUALIZING PALESTINE | 101

V1.1 NOV 2019
DATA bit.ly/vp101data

Visualizing Palestine
WWW.VISUALIZINGPALESTINE.ORG/101

VISUAL 2.1
Creative Commons License Icons

⁷ Michelle Alexander, “[Time to Break the Silence on Palestine](#),” *The New York Times*, January 19, 2019.