

Increasing Activity in the Episcopal Church

Our Episcopal Diocese of Olympia passed two resolutions at its annual conference in October, each with an overwhelming majority vote.

One stated that, **“We recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist and we condemn the continued occupation, segregation and oppression of the Palestinian people,”** and resolved that the Convention **“urge the President of the United States and the U.S. Congress to take action to oppose Israeli laws and practices that result in unequal rights for two peoples.”**

This resolution will proceed to the General Convention in July, 2022 for consideration by the national church, along with complementary resolutions from other dioceses.

The second resolution encouraged **“education in congregations about Israel’s ongoing military occupation of the West Bank and blockade of Gaza, and Israel’s separate, inequitable laws and unequal treatment of Palestinians, listening to the voices of Palestinians and encouraging travel to the Holy Land,”** for the purpose of **“raising awareness, facilitating education, encouraging discussion and promoting advocacy in both church and secular circles on behalf of Palestinians whose voices are not being heard, as we are called by our faith to do.”**

The Episcopal Church of Vermont passed a resolution at its convention November 4, condemning by a majority of 89-25 what it called Israel’s apartheid policies.

Similar and related resolutions are being considered throughout the Episcopal Church.

Title: Peace in the Holy Land – Striving for Justice

Submitted by: The Bishop's Committee for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land,
Diocese of Olympia

Resolution

Resolved, that this 111th Convention of the Diocese of Olympia urge education in congregations about Israel's ongoing military occupation of the West Bank and blockade of Gaza, and Israel's separate, inequitable laws and unequal treatment of Palestinians, listening to the voices of Palestinians and encouraging travel to the Holy Land; and be it further

Resolved, that the Secretary of Convention provide copies of this Resolution and Explanation to congregations for the purpose of raising awareness, facilitating education, encouraging discussion and promoting advocacy in both church and secular circles on behalf of Palestinians whose voices are not being heard, as we are called by our faith to do; and be it further

Resolved, that the Bishop's Committee for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land serve as a resource to congregations in this work and as a source for educational materials, curricula, films, speakers and guidance.

Explanation

Statement of Beliefs

We lament and condemn all acts of violence in Israel/Palestine regardless of perpetrator, and the loss of life, the injury, the fear and the enmity they engender.

We recognize and condemn the increasing acts and attitudes of antisemitism in the United States and in our Diocese and offer support to all who are targeted for their faith or identity. We also recognize the right of Israel to exist and God's love for the people who live there and for all who consider it a sanctuary and refuge from a history of brutal persecution.

We recognize the duty of Christians and our right as U.S. citizens to speak out against unjust acts committed by others, including those of the government of Israel, and we reject the conflation of advocacy for Palestinian rights with antisemitism. We join concerned people of all faiths in peaceful protest to address injustice.

Human Rights

Palestinians living within Israel and in the Israeli Occupied Territories are subject to different laws, policies and practices than their Israeli Jewish counterparts, constituting a categorically discriminatory form of systemic subjugation that severely limits the freedom, health, welfare and lives of Palestinians.¹

The State of Israel was formed in 1948 with more than 700,000 Palestinians expelled or forced to flee from their homes, beginning a pattern of inferior rights that exists through today. Since the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, the government of Israel has continued to destroy Palestinian homes and sanction the confiscation of Palestinian land for the establishment of Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank, both actions considered illegal under international law. Throughout this time, Israel has demolished an estimated 55,000 homes in the West Bank and Gaza, and approximately 500,000 Israeli settlers now live on Palestinian property in the West Bank. Violence against Palestinians by settlers is common and severe.²

For over 50 years, the Israeli government has assigned different sets of rights to two peoples -- one set inordinately superior to the other, one people free and the other severely restricted, one people's rights determined by the other, one people holding power and the other imprisoned under it.³

The international Nobel laureate Human Rights Watch and the widely respected Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem both issued reports in 2021 documenting decades of legal and human rights abuses against Palestinians by the State of Israel and concluding that Israel's ongoing discriminatory and oppressive treatment of Palestinians constitutes *apartheid*, a word that derives its meaning from the simple concept of apartness. Both organizations found these abuses to be extreme, pervasive, entrenched, intentional and longstanding.⁴

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>
https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid
These two publications document much of the information in this Explanation and are recommended for further study.

² <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/05/the-meaning-of-nakba-israel-palestine-1948-gaza/560294>
<https://icahd.org/2020/03/15/end-home-demolitions-an-introduction>
<https://ifamericansknew.org/stat/settlements.html>
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/netanyahu approves settlement-building/2021/01/11/0e009b08-541c-11eb-acc5-92d2819a1ccb_story.html
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/04/1089752>

³ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>

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Palestinians have been increasingly deprived of self-determination, equal rights, natural resources, freedom of movement and peaceful dissent. Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to roadblocks, checkpoints, inspections, middle-of-the-night arrests of children in their homes and daily degradations at the hands of armed Israeli forces. Palestinians living within Israel do not have rights equal to their Jewish Israeli neighbors. While Jews outside of Israel are able to immigrate and become citizens, Palestinians are not.⁵

In 2018 Israel passed the Nation-State law, declaring Israel a nation-state of the Jewish people and stating that the right to exercise national self-determination belongs solely to the Jewish people. The law declares Jewish settlements on Palestinian land a national value and promotes their growth. Additionally, the law states that the nation's official language is Hebrew. This law was upheld by the Israeli Supreme Court in July 2021.⁶

Palestinians in the West Bank live under an Israeli military legal system that provides significantly fewer rights and protections than the civilian legal system governing Jewish Israelis living in the same area. This is particularly harmful to Palestinian children who are routinely incarcerated without charges being filed, subjected to solitary confinement and harsh interrogations, transferred across borders in contravention of international law and convicted at a rate of 95%.⁷

Israel controls water from West Bank aquifers, diverting the majority of it to Israeli citizens. Israeli per capita water consumption is approximately four times that of Palestinians, so that Israelis living in settlements sometimes enjoy irrigated agriculture, green lawns and swimming pools while Palestinians, on whose land the settlers live, receive water allotments below World Health Organization standards. Palestinians are often forced to buy from Israel water that Israel has taken from Palestinian aquifers.⁸

Palestinians living in Gaza have been under blockade since 2007, preventing the free movement of people, medical supplies and goods across the border. As a consequence, Gazans face endemic poverty, unemployment, physical and mental health deterioration and extreme hardship. Basic necessities including food, safe drinking water, electricity, fuel, sewage disposal

⁵ <https://www.afsc.org/resource/restricted-movement-occupied-palestinian-territory>
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⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/israeli-supreme-court-upholds-contentious-jewish-state-law-jewish-israelis-supreme-court-jerusalem-arabic-b1880719.html>

⁷ https://www.dci-palestine.org/military_detention
https://www.btselem.org/topic/administrative_detention
https://www.dci-palestine.org/palestinian_children_in_the_israeli_military_detention_system
https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/201803_minors_in_jeopardy

⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/11/the-occupation-of-water>
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and medical care are in insufficient supply. Ninety to 97% of the water is unsafe for human consumption and requires filtration for which equipment is frequently unavailable.⁹

Over the years, violence has persisted. The bombing of Gaza in May of 2021, triggered by threats to evict Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem and other events, ended with 256 Palestinians killed, 66 of whom were children. Thirteen Israelis were killed. In Gaza, extraordinary damage was inflicted on homes, hospitals, schools, infrastructure and access to health care and basic services including water, hygiene and sanitation.¹⁰

Previous Episcopal Resolutions

Over the past several years the General Convention of the Episcopal Church has passed numerous resolutions critical of Israel's denial of Palestinian human rights including resolutions that seek to oppose the settlements and home demolitions, protect Palestinian children from military court mistreatment, restrict the use of U.S. aid in violation of human rights, restore international aid to Palestinians and in other ways to promote basic rights.¹¹

Impediments to Peaceful Protest

Palestinians are not permitted to peacefully protest in the Occupied Territories, and Palestinians and their supporters in the United States have been impeded in their advocacy by prohibitions against peaceful protest. Legislation exists in approximately 35 states penalizing or criminalizing efforts to support the nonviolent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, and numerous institutions including colleges and universities have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism which effectively and dangerously equates criticism of Israel with antisemitism.¹²

⁹ <https://www.unrwa.org/activity/health-gaza-strip>

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/water-crisis-may-make-gaza-strip-uninhabitable-by-2020>

<https://www.afsc.org/resource/restricted-movement-occupied-palestinian-territory>

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/article/israel-gaza-what-we-know.html>

<https://www.unocha.org/story/daily-noon-briefing-highlights-occupied-palestinian-territory-and-israel-0>

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/05/26/world/middleeast/gaza-israel-children.html?searchResultPosition=9>

<https://www.ochaopt.org/poc/24-31-may-2021>

¹¹ https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_search.pl

1994-D065, 2003-D008, 2018-B016, B021, C038, D027

¹² <https://law.acri.org.il/en/protestright-subject/freedom-of-expression-and-protest>

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/erdan-asks-35-us-states-to-activate-anti-bds-laws-against-ben-jerrys>

<https://www.ajc.org/us-campus-adoption-of-the-working-definition>

<https://palestinelegal.org/redefinition-efforts>

<https://jewishcurrents.org/states-are-moving-to-class-criticism-of-israel-as-antisemitism>

Commandments of Our Faith

The Episcopal Church has become increasingly aware of the injury done by systemic racism in our own country, and the depth of harm it inflicts. In 2020, the Diocese of Olympia joined many other Dioceses to endorse the Anti-Racism Covenant, identifying and condemning racism in our midst and calling us to action: to study, pray and work for racial justice.¹³

As Episcopalians, we are compelled by our faith to stand up to injustice, to be peacemakers and to help the oppressed. Our Baptismal Covenant calls on us to “strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.” We recognize that Israel’s ongoing military occupation and its separate, discriminatory laws and treatment of Palestinians are antithetical to the Gospel message, and that silence in light of them contravenes the pledge of our Baptismal Covenant.

Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice (a worldwide ecumenical Christian coalition) write in Cry for Hope, “The very being of the church, the integrity of the Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake We cannot serve God while remaining silent about the oppression of the Palestinians.”¹⁴

Our Role as US Citizens

The United States gives Israel approximately \$3.8 billion each year in military aid, which constitutes roughly 59% of total U.S. foreign military financing. The U.S. further supports Israel’s unjust and discriminatory policies and practices in other ways, including vetoing actions at the United Nations. Several existing U.S. laws prohibit the provision of U.S. aid to countries that don’t meet human rights standards, however these standards are not always applied to Israel, nor is the aid process transparent enough to be adequately monitored.¹⁵

Our Role in the Episcopal Church

We have a role to play in the tragedy of the Holy Land because we are called by our faith to stand up to injustice; because of our historical and theological connections to the region and its people; and because the United States provides tremendous monetary and other support to Israel’s ongoing mistreatment of Palestinians.

¹³ <https://ecww.org/a-covenant-to-root-out-racism-2>

¹⁴ <https://cryforhope.org>

¹⁵ <https://usafacts.org/articles/how-much-military-aid-does-the-us-give-to-israel>

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/05/12/bringing-assistance-to-israel-in-line-with-rights-and-u.s.-laws-pub-84503>

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<https://fmep.org/resource/israel-palestine-the-role-of-congress-an-accelerated-learning-series>, Part 1

It is our belief that peace can never be achieved while one people systematically controls the rights of another and that violence will not end until equal rights are established.

The Bishop's Committee for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land was created to raise awareness and facilitate understanding of the challenges facing all who live in the Holy Land, including our Episcopal brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Jerusalem as they struggle to maintain a Christian presence under increasingly difficult conditions imposed by the Israeli occupation.

As a longstanding Companion of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, the Diocese of Olympia stands in solidarity with our Episcopal brothers and sisters in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. We commend and support the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem in their efforts to minister to the spiritual, health and educational needs of the Palestinian people.

Our members pray and deeply believe that peace will come to the children of Abraham when Jews and Palestinians share a land that guarantees equal human and civil rights for all.

Title: Justice and Peace in the Holy Land – Our Call to Action

Submitted by: The Bishop's Committee for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land,
Diocese of Olympia

Resolution

Resolved, that this 111th Convention of the Diocese of Olympia submit the following resolution to the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church:

Resolved, that we recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist and we condemn the continued occupation, segregation and oppression of the Palestinian people; and be it further

Resolved, that the Convention urge the President of the United States and the U.S. Congress to take action to oppose Israeli laws and practices that result in unequal rights for two peoples.

Explanation

Statement of Beliefs

We lament and condemn all acts of violence in Israel/Palestine regardless of perpetrator, and the loss of life, the injury, the fear and the enmity they engender.

We recognize and condemn the increasing acts and attitudes of antisemitism in the United States and in our Diocese and offer support to all who are targeted for their faith or identity. We also recognize the right of Israel to exist and God's love for the people who live there and for all who consider it a sanctuary and refuge from a history of brutal persecution.

We recognize the duty of Christians and our right as U.S. citizens to speak out against unjust acts committed by others, including those of the government of Israel, and we reject the conflation of advocacy for Palestinian rights with antisemitism. We join concerned people of all faiths in peaceful protest to address injustice.

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The State of Israel was formed in 1948 with more than 700,000 Palestinians expelled or forced to flee from their homes, beginning a pattern of inferior rights that exists through today. Since the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, the government of Israel has continued to destroy Palestinian homes and sanction the confiscation of Palestinian land for the establishment of Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank, both actions considered illegal under international law. Throughout this time, Israel has demolished an estimated 55,000 homes in the West Bank and Gaza, and approximately 500,000 Israeli settlers now live on Palestinian property in the West Bank. Violence against Palestinians by settlers is common and severe.¹⁷

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Palestinians have been increasingly deprived of self-determination, equal rights, natural resources, freedom of movement and peaceful dissent. Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to roadblocks, checkpoints, inspections, middle-of-the-night arrests of children in their homes and daily degradations at the hands of armed Israeli forces. Palestinians living within Israel do not have rights equal to their Jewish Israeli neighbors. While Jews outside of Israel are able to immigrate and become citizens, Palestinians are not.²⁰

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²² https://www.dci-palestine.org/military_detention

https://www.btselem.org/topic/administrative_detention

https://www.dci-palestine.org/palestinian_children_in_the_israeli_military_detention_system

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²³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/11/the-occupation-of-water>

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It is our belief that peace can never be achieved while one people systematically controls the rights of another and that violence will not end until equal rights are established.

The Bishop’s Committee for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land was created to raise awareness and facilitate understanding of the challenges facing all who live in the Holy Land, including our Episcopal brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Jerusalem as they struggle to maintain a Christian presence under increasingly difficult conditions imposed by the Israeli occupation.

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