

COMPELLED TO WITNESS: ANSWERING THE CRY OF OUR PALESTINIAN SIBLINGS

(Sense-of-the-Assembly)

WHEREAS the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada sent its first missionary to Palestine in 1851 and, through more than a dozen Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) mission partners in Israel and Palestine, Disciples have worked alongside the people there with appointed mission workers and financial support; and

WHEREAS the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has a history of commitment to racial, economic and social justice; and has spoken clearly and participated actively in movements for civil rights and anti-racism in the US and Canada and for human rights and the just resolution of conflict around the world; and between 1973 and 2019, our General Assembly has articulated clear positions in support of justice and peace for Palestinians and Israelis¹; and

WHEREAS the establishment of the State of Israel led to the 75-year displacement and dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes and property—amounting to a modern-day form of settler colonialism and creating a refugee population that now numbers more than 7 million²; and the State of Israel has imposed a harsh 56-years-long occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip; and

WHEREAS globally recognized human rights organizations—including B’Tselem-The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International—and the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur have issued detailed reports³ describing the State of Israel’s apartheid system; and

WHEREAS in February 2022, Disciples leaders issued a Pastoral Letter, *Compelled to Witness: Affirming Justice, Rights, and Accountability in Promoting Peace in Israel/Palestine*⁴, naming actions and circumstances that have led to the deterioration of hope for a just peace in Israel/Palestine, and finding that “Israeli policies and practices that discriminate against Palestinians—Christian and Muslims alike—are consistent with the international legal definition of the crime of apartheid as defined in the International

¹ Disciples General Assembly resolutions related the Middle East: https://www.globalministries.org/mee_resolutions/

² <https://www.anera.org/blog/who-are-palestinian-refugees/>

³ B’Tselem, https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid; Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>; Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/>; United Nations Special Rapporteur, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-20>

⁴ <https://www.globalministries.org/compelled-to-witness/>

36 Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (ICSPCA,
37 1973)⁵ and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2002)⁶; and

38 **WHEREAS** a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine must be grounded in
39 the message of Scripture, both in the Hebrew prophets⁷ and the life and teachings of
40 Jesus, as well as international law and globally recognized human rights conventions;
41 and

42 **WHEREAS** in December 2009, our mission partner Kairos Palestine issued *A Moment*
43 *of Truth: A word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian Suffering*⁸, a
44 profoundly theological document grounded in the Biblical texts, which declares:

45 ...We believe that our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning
46 of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include
47 all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land. In light of the teachings of
48 the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political programme, but
49 rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. It was the initiation of the
50 fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth (KP 2.3); and

51 **WHEREAS** *Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action*⁹, issued in July 2020 by Palestinian
52 Christian leaders and theologians, states that “the very being of the church, the integrity
53 of the Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake,” and “support for the
54 oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word
55 or deed, is a sin”; and

56 **WHEREAS** in 2022, Kairos Palestine published *A Dossier on Israeli Apartheid: A*
57 *Pressing Call to Churches Around the World*¹⁰, a resource that: points to the conditions
58 necessary to establish the crime of apartheid; offers a Biblical/theological reflection that
59 describes the sin of apartheid; reminds readers that “The church has named and
60 resisted the sin and injustice of apartheid in the past”; and repeats the Palestinians’ cry,

⁵ According to the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (ICPCA, 1973), the international legal definition of apartheid is, “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them.” [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.10_International%20Convention%20on%20the%20Suppression%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Apartheid.pdf] The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) defines “racial discrimination” as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.” [<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cerd.pdf>]

⁶ Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC, 2002) defines the crime of apartheid as “inhumane acts ... committed in the context of an institutionalised regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.” [<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>]

⁷ E.g. Isaiah 61:1-2; Isaiah 5:8; Micah 6:8; Amos 5:23; Hosea 2:21; Luke 4:18-19,

⁸ <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document>

⁹ <https://www.cryforhope.org/media/attachments/2020/06/30/cry-for-hope-english.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/resources/publication/a-dossier-on-israeli-apartheid-a-pressing-call-to-churches-around-the-world>

61 “Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the
62 two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love?”;

63 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the General Assembly of the Christian Church
64 (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, meeting in Louisville, Kentucky,
65 July 29-August 1, 2023:

- 66
- 67 • Embraces an understanding that the Bible’s narrative—beginning with creation and
68 extending through the calling of the Israelites, the prophets’ witness, the ministry of
69 Jesus, the witness of the apostles, and Revelation’s vision of a new heaven and a
70 new earth and the Tree of Life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the
71 nations—speaks of God’s blessing extending to “all the families of the earth
72 (Genesis 12.3)”; and
- 73 • Believes that all people living in Palestine and Israel are created in the image of God
74 deserving of equal dignity and their human rights; and
- 75 • Affirms the 2022 Disciples leadership Pastoral Letter, *Compelled to Witness:
76 Affirming Justice, Rights, and Accountability in Promoting Peace in Israel/Palestine;*
77 and
- 78 • Asserts that the continued oppression of the Palestinian people is a matter of
79 theological urgency and represents a sin in violation of the message of the Biblical
80 prophets and the Gospel, and that all efforts to defend or legitimate the oppression
81 of the Palestinian people represent a fundamental denial of the Gospel; and
- 82 • Rejects any theology or ideology including Christian Zionism, supercessionism,
83 antisemitism or anti-Islam bias that would privilege or exclude any one nation, race,
84 culture, or religion; and
- 85 • Condemns speech and acts of antisemitism, and rejects the notion that criticism of
86 policies of the State of Israel is inherently antisemitic; and

87 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the General Assembly:

- 88 • Affirms that many of the laws, policies and practices of the State of Israel meet the
89 definition of apartheid as defined in international law, documented in the reports
90 cited above, and described as such by some of our mission partners over the past
91 two decades, and affirmed in our Disciples leaders’ pastoral letter, *Compelled to
92 Witness*; and
- 93 • Affirms that all peoples have the right to self-determination and to their aspirations
94 for full and equal citizenship in the shaping of their corporate religious, cultural, and
95 political life, and that a just resolution of conflicting claims is only achieved through
96 the equal protection of civil and human rights, the fair and just sharing of land and
97 resources, and peaceful negotiation based on international law and UN resolutions;
98 and
- 99 • Calls for an end to Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories consistent with
100 international law and UN resolutions; and

- 101 • Affirms the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes if they so choose
102 or to be compensated for their loss of property, consistent with UN General
103 Assembly resolution 194; and
- 104 • Insists on the U.S. constitutional right to freedom of speech and assembly to protest
105 the laws, policies and practices of the State of Israel and to support the rights of
106 Palestinians, including the use of economic measures by individuals, institutions,
107 corporations and religious bodies that advocate for lasting peace with justice¹¹; and
- 108 **FINALLY, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that congregations, regions, general units and
109 related institutions and organizations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) be
110 encouraged to:
- 111 • Listen to the voices of Palestinians, with special attention to statements such as
112 *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth* (2009) and *Cry for Hope* (2020), and;
- 113 • Participate in travel opportunities that expose pilgrims to the Palestinian community;
114 and
- 115 • Make use of resources from Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of
116 Christ) and the United Church of Christ¹²; and
- 117 • Use this resolution to guide their support for the aspirations of our denominational
118 partners in the region and in our advocacy with the governments of the United
119 States and Canada consistent with the call in *Compelled to Witness*.

120
121 Heart of the Rockies Christian Church, Fort Collins, CO
122 Division of Overseas Ministries
123 United Christian Church, California, PA
124 Disciples Peace Fellowship
125 Tapestry Church, Bargersville, IN
126 Harbor Christian Church, Newport Beach, CA
127

128 129 130 **BACKGROUND**

131
132 Justice is turned back,
133 and righteousness stands at a distance;
134 for truth stumbles in the public square,
135 and uprightness cannot enter,
136 Truth is lacking...

137
138 The LORD saw it, and it displeased him

¹¹ https://www.globalministries.org/employing_economic_measures/

¹² https://www.globalministries.org/resource/mee_resources_index/

139 that there was no justice.
140 He saw that there was no one,
141 and was appalled that there was no one to intervene...”
142 Isaiah 59:14-16
143

144 This resolution is a response to the cries of our Palestinian mission partners and the
145 February 2022 Pastoral Letter— *Compelled to Witness: Affirming Justice, Rights, and*
146 *Accountability in Promoting Peace in Israel/Palestine*¹³—issued by our denomination’s
147 three church officers authorized to speak on behalf of the Disciples. At its March 31,
148 2022 meeting, the Board of Directors of the Division of Overseas Ministries of the
149 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) affirmed and endorsed the “Compelled to
150 Witness” pastoral letter, and urged robust education, advocacy, and engagement of the
151 matters raised in the letter, through Global Ministries.

152 The resolution affirms the Disciples’ past stands for justice and, referencing reports from
153 globally recognized human rights organizations, calls on the General Assembly to
154 declare that, through its laws, policies and practices governing the lives of Palestinians,
155 Israel has established an apartheid system which is a contradiction to the message of
156 the Hebrew prophets and the life and teachings of Jesus as well as international law
157 and globally recognized human rights conventions.

158 Further, the resolution explicitly condemns speech and acts of antisemitism, rejects any
159 interpretations of Scripture that use the Bible to elevate the rights of one people, Jews,
160 over another, Palestinians, and calls on the three manifestations of our church to use
161 this resolution to guide their support for the aspirations of our denomination’s mission
162 partners in the region and in our advocacy with the governments of the United States
163 and Canada consistent with these principles.

164 Most recently, our mission partner Kairos Palestine published *A Dossier on Israeli*
165 *Apartheid: A Pressing Call to Churches Around the World*¹⁴. The dossier clearly defines
166 apartheid according to international law and offers a Biblical/theological reflection
167 describing the sin of apartheid. Also included are summaries of and links to reports from
168 widely recognized human rights organizations citing Israeli apartheid, and statements
169 made by churches, faith groups, and international leaders (including prominent Israeli
170 Jews).

**The General Board recommends that the General Assembly ADOPT GA-2339.
(Discussion Time: 12 minutes)**

¹³ <https://www.globalministries.org/compelled-to-witness/>

¹⁴ <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/resources/publication/a-dossier-on-israeli-apartheid-a-pressing-call-to-churches-around-the-world>