

Mennonite Church USA Statement on Israel-Palestine Packet

Submitted to the 2015 Kansas City Convention Resolutions Committee of Mennonite Church USA
27 February 2015

Table of Contents

Mennonite Church USA Statement on Israel-Palestine.....	2
Congregational, Individual, and Constituent Agencies Endorsements of the Church Statement on Israel-Palestine	4
Congregational Endorsements	4
Individual Endorsements	4
Constituent and Related Agencies Endorsements.....	4
Anticipated Reasons for Supporting and Objecting to this Church Statement.....	5
Anticipated Objection 1: Doesn't this resolution contradict the theology of Christian Zionism that is supported by many Evangelicals?	5
Anticipated Objection 2: This resolution is not focused enough on the suffering of Jews at the hands of Christians over the centuries and their need for their own nation-state.	6
Anticipated Objection 3: The resolution calls the occupation of Palestine (Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem) a sin. Haven't both sides in this conflict sinned?	7
Anticipated Objection 4: The Mennonite Church should not be involved in political issues that propose alignment with a particular political agenda.	8
Anticipated Objection 5: Why should we go on record with a resolution in regard to Israel-Palestine when other issues are equally pressing?	8
Anticipated Objection 6: Won't Mennonite Church USA be targeted, harassed and labeled "anti-Semitic"?.....	9
Final words.....	10
Brief history of Mennonite involvement in Palestine-Israel.....	11
Resources for Further Learning	13
Kairos Palestine statements and educational resources	13
Mennonite Church USA	13
Mennonite Central Committee.....	13
Mennonite related books.....	14
Mennonite related websites.....	14
MennoPIN Resource List: Suggested Materials for your Congregation	15

Mennonite Church USA Statement on Israel-Palestine

Preamble

“For more than sixty-five years, Mennonites have lived, studied and ministered in Palestine and Israel...We open our hearts when we again hear of the suffering you experience in an occupied land as homes are taken from you, families and communities are separated by walls and checkpoints, and countless large and small indignities and humiliations are visited upon you each day.”

This excerpt from a 2011 letter written by Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA on behalf of the Executive Board, was a response to *Kairos Palestine*, an appeal from Palestinian Christians in December 2009.

Already in June 2007 ten representatives of Mennonite-affiliated agencies who traveled together to the region reported in an *Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations: Becoming Peacemakers in Israel/Palestine* that, “The continuing Israeli military occupation and the dispossession of Palestinians is sinful, responsible for unjust suffering and a major cause of the ongoing conflict.”

Since 2007 the urgency of the crisis in Israel-Palestine has only deepened, with little progress to show politically and ever-increasing levels of suffering. We find ourselves at a *Kairos* moment, as articulated by Palestinian Christians.

We strongly affirm the longstanding Mennonite presence in the region of Israel-Palestine, including the work of Mennonite Mission Network, Eastern Mennonite Missions, Virginia Mennonite Missions, Mennonite colleges, universities and seminaries, Mennonite Central Committee, Christian Peacemaker Teams and Mennonite Church Canada.

The presence of these workers and others has provided a powerful witness to the way of peace in a place of great conflict. In turn, our understanding of our Anabaptist identity and beliefs has been greatly enriched by interactions with fellow believers and others in the region.

We urge that programs of service to Palestinians and Israelis working for a just peace not only continue but be enhanced, including work by various Mennonite-related groups to improve lives and build peace and advocacy initiatives from Mennonite Central Committee’s Washington (D.C.) Office.

We note the personal and congregational concern that Mennonites have long shared for Christian stewardship and the social and environmental impact of our investments. We believe that the finances contributed to our churches will be used to further our Christian witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we believe that these resources should not be used in the furtherance of pain, death, and suffering of one people at the hands of another. We affirm Everence’s practice of screening investments with attention to issues of human rights and military involvement, among other considerations.

We affirm the “Come and See” initiative of Mennonite Church USA, which seeks to provide opportunities for Mennonite pastors and other leaders to participate in Israel-Palestine learning tours and to “come and see” the current reality (Purposeful Plan, lines 980-984). We encourage all church members who are considering travel to the region to follow the goals and criteria/tour components for Come and See tours as outlined by Mennonite Church USA.

We acknowledge the need for repentance of our own complicity in the history of violence committed by Christians against Jews. All actions that stereotype or demonize people based on their religious beliefs or ethnicity are contrary to the teachings of Jesus and we must have no part in them.

Resolution

In light of the foregoing information, we thereby resolve:

- **To encourage the reading and study of the *Kairos Palestine* document.** We affirm our particular kinship as brothers and sisters in Christ with Palestinian Christians. In this context we hear the “cry for help” expressed in the *Kairos Palestine* document, issued in 2009. Based in a theology of loving ones’ enemies and sacrificial love, this document is worthy of careful study by member congregations of Mennonite Church USA, as recommended by the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board in 2011. In support of this effort, we encourage Mennonite Church USA to develop a structure and process for disseminating and studying the *Kairos Palestine* document and appropriate study materials, in conjunction with the Mennonite Palestine-Israel Network. We encourage congregational resource advocates to make available information about Israel-Palestine.
- **That Israel’s military occupation of Palestine is sinful, based on injustice and must come to an end; and that as U.S. citizens we are complicit in this sin due to our government’s significant and longstanding military support for Israel.** As Palestinian Christian leaders noted in 2009 in the *Kairos Palestine* document, “the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity.” Similarly, the 2007 *Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations* observed, “The continuing Israeli military occupation and the dispossession of Palestinians is sinful, responsible for unjust suffering and the major cause of the ongoing conflict.”
- **To consider how our financial lives are enmeshed in the policies of occupation, through our investments, individual purchases and tax dollars.** To this end, we direct representatives of the Executive Board of the Mennonite Church USA along with representatives from Everence, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Palestine Israel Network, Mennonite Mission Network, and other related agencies involved in the region, in mutual consultation, to review, at least on an annual basis, the investments of Mennonite Church USA for the purpose of withdrawing investments from corporations known to be profiting from the occupation and/or destruction of life and property in Israel-Palestine. A report of this review and related activities should be submitted on an annual basis to members of the Executive Board.

We further urge individuals and congregations to avoid the purchase of products that enable the military occupation to continue, including items produced in Israeli settlements.

In keeping with our historic commitments as a peace church and consistent with our opposition to the militarized resolution of conflict, we condemn the use of violence by all sides. We call for an end to U.S. military assistance to all countries, including Israel. We urge nation-states, including our own, to seek security in the only way it may truly be found, through relationships of mutuality and trust and the guarantee of equal rights for all peoples.

- **To pray earnestly for all Israelis and Palestinians.** As commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, we commit ourselves to pray ceaselessly for all in Israel-Palestine, particularly our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters, all those working courageously for peace including Israeli conscientious objectors, and all who have been impacted by violence.

In addition, we request that a report covering all activities related to this resolution be developed and delivered, under the leadership of the Director of Holistic Witness, at the next Mennonite Church USA convention.

Congregational, Individual, and Constituent Agencies Endorsements of the Church Statement on Israel-Palestine

Congregational Endorsements

1. Albuquerque Mennonite Church, 1300 Girard Blvd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106
2. Albany Mennonite Church, 3505 Kizer Ave. NE, Albany, OR 97322
3. Blossom Hill Mennonite Church, 333 Delp Road, Lancaster, PA 17601
4. Community Mennonite Church, 70 S. High St., Harrisonburg VA 22801
5. Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster, 328 West Orange St., Lancaster, PA 17603
6. Emmanuel Mennonite Church, 1286 NW 18th Ave., Gainesville, FL, 32609
7. Eugene Mennonite Church, 3590 W. 18th Ave., Eugene, OR 97402
8. First Mennonite Church Bluffton, 101 S. Jackson St., Bluffton, OH 45817
9. First Mennonite Church Lincoln, 7300 Holdrege, Lincoln, NE 68505
10. Lima Mennonite Church, 1318 North Main St., Lima, OH 45801
11. Living Light of Peace, 5927 Miller St., Arvada, CO 80004
12. Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church, 655 S. Lorraine St., Wichita, KS 67211
13. Nueva Vida Norristown New Life Mennonite Church, 752 Sandy St., Norristown, PA
14. Pilgrim's Mennonite Church, 21 South 12th St., Akron, PA 17501
15. Rainbow Mennonite Church, 1444 Southwest Blvd., Kansas City, KS 66103
16. Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church, 1512 Mulberry St., Sioux Falls, SD 57103

Individual Endorsements

1. J. Daryl Byler, Executive Director, Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, Eastern Mennonite University, 1200 Park Rd., Harrisonburg, VA 22802
2. Ken Burkholder, Pastor, Deep Run East Mennonite Church, 350 Kellers Church Rd., Perkasie, PA 18944
3. The Justice and Peace Ministry of Salford Mennonite Church, 480 Groffs Mill Rd., Harleysville, PA 19438

Constituent and Related Agencies Endorsements

Letters of support from a number of constituent and related agencies are attached or will be sent directly to the Resolutions Committee, including letters from Mennonite Central Committee U.S. (attached), Christian Peacemaker Team-Palestine (attached), Mennonite Church USA Executive Board (anticipated), Mennonite Mission Network (anticipated), Everence (anticipated), and Mennonite Education Agency (anticipated).

Anticipated Reasons for Supporting and Objecting to this Church Statement

Sonia K. Weaver's book What Is Palestine-Israel? Answers to Common Questions (Herald Press, 2007) offers a good introduction to this conversation. We would direct readers to this book for helpful responses to questions raised about this statement. What follows are some particular responses offered to some of the most common questions.

Anticipated Objection 1: Doesn't this resolution contradict the theology of Christian Zionism that is supported by many Evangelicals?

What are the theological and eschatological (end time) beliefs of Christian Zionism?

- Jews have special favor with God and neither time, history nor the religious conditions of Jews can affect or alter God's special favor towards the Jewish people.
- The Holy Land belongs to the Jews. It always has and it always will. Neither history, nor the passing of centuries, nor the religious or moral condition of Jews today can alter this fact.
- Jews today are an extension of the Israelites in Biblical times. Therefore, just as the nations during the Old Testament era were judged as to how they treated ancient Israel, the same is true today. God will bless nations and individuals who bless the modern Jewish state and he will curse countries and individuals who curse it.
- Old Testament prophecies, although uttered thousands of years ago, are being fulfilled in Israel today and have been since 1948 when the state was born.
- God's 'end time' plan is directly connected with modern Israel. Christians can speed up the coming of Christ, as they help bring about the fulfillment of prophecies that pertain to Israel.¹

For a detailed examination of these how these beliefs contradict and are not supported by Biblical scripture as interpreted and applied in Anabaptist theology, see:

- "A Biblical-Theological Reflection on Israel: In Response to the Mennonite Church USA Open Letter to Congregations on Becoming Peacemakers in Israel/Palestine" (2007). <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mc-usa-2007-open-letter-biblical-theological-reflection-on-israel.pdf>
- "Christian Zionism and Peace in the Holy Land," *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 35.3 (July-September 2005). <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mcc-ponl-2005-christian-zionism.pdf>

Supportive Response: The Zionist agenda is not supported by the ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels or Paul's letters or basic Christian beliefs. The current government of Israel is neither sanctioned by God in the Old Testament nor is its policies of occupation supported by most Jews.

There is a profound theological misrepresentation by Christian Zionism of God's purposes and the relationship between Jews and Christians as well as people of other faiths in God's great act of reconciliation. The gradual unfolding of God's grace and embracing of *all people* as the "Chosen People" is summarized well by the Apostle Paul in Romans 11: 25-32. The New

¹ Taken from Rev. Alex Awad, "Christian Zionism: Their Theology, Our Nightmare," *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 35.3 (July-September 2005), 2.

Testament promotes a vision of one community of humankind, free of the hostility and conflict generated by ethnic, class and gender divisions (Eph. 2:14, 19-20; Gal. 3:28).

Old Testament prophets foresaw this same unfolding history of God's plan through the Jewish faith: The sharing of the land of Palestine among all peoples who live there, with common land rights, living in peace (Ezekiel 47: 21-23); The special relationship of all people to God, not only the Jews (Amos 9:7, reiterated in I Peter 2:9); That Jerusalem will become a symbol of salvation to all peoples (Ps. 87). We share this same vision and hope for all Palestinians and Israelis, of "secure dwellings" (Isaiah 32:18), to sit securely under vine and fig tree without fear (Micah 4:4).²

In challenging the Christian Zionist position, we also seek to avoid a "supersessionist" or "replacement" theology that says God's covenant with the Jewish people has been superseded or replaced by the Church. And while that conversation is beyond the scope of this paper, we affirm God's blessing on the Jewish people. However, we must still ask ourselves what it means to "bless" the Jewish people and the State of Israel today. Is it to give uncritical and unconditional support to Israel? Or does blessing Israel instead mean calling upon Israel to love mercy and do justice in the land?³

Anticipated Objection 2: This resolution is not focused enough on the suffering of Jews at the hands of Christians over the centuries and their need for their own nation-state.

*"As Christians addressing the Palestinian's cause we must also acknowledge our shameful role in the historic persecution of Jewish people. We recognize the dehumanizing and destructive power of doctrines and theologies that denigrated Judaism. Our predecessors perpetuated anti-Semitic stereotypes, practiced scapegoating and cloaked prejudice, hostility and murder itself in the robes of our religion. We confess that our churches failed to resist, and sometimes even aided and abetted pogroms, mass dislocations of Jews, and the calamity of the Nazi Holocaust itself. In so doing, they betrayed the teaching and example of the one we claim to follow. We speak for and with our forbears in expressing deep remorse. With a commitment to never forget those failures and to be instructed by them, we pledge ourselves to growth in faithfulness, compassion and justice."*⁴

Supportive Response: We must repent. We must work, and in many cases, suffer for peace. Our hearts must be filled with love for both Israelis and Palestinians. We must not make the mistake of depriving Israelis their rights. But we must also uphold international standards of human rights and the call for democracy, freedom and justice for all citizens, not just the privileged ones.

² See Alain Epp Weaver (Ed.), *Under Vine and Fig Tree: Biblical Theologies of Land and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Telford, Pa: Cascadia Pub. House, 2007).

³ Sonia K. Weaver, *What is Palestine-Israel?: Answers to Common Questions* (Scottdale, Pa: Herald Press, 2007), 53-54.

⁴ Kairos USA, "A Call to Action: U.S. Response to the Kairos Palestine Document" (2012), p. 2. <http://kairosusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Kairos-USA-Call-to-Action.pdf>

The ministry of Jesus took place within the context of Roman imperial rule over Palestine. He renewed the ancient Jewish injunctions against the expropriation of other's property and resources, called for the cancellation of debts and foremost he declared a radical new ethic: To love one's enemies. This new commandment could transform the hearts of one's enemies as well as direct oneself toward justice and loving kindness. We have seen the force of this ethic carried out in modern times through resistance to injustice by such persons as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and Cesar Chavez.

We encourage all Israelis and Palestinians to work for democracy and the human and civil rights for all citizens, whether inside Israel, the Occupied Territories, or in the refugee camps throughout the region: equal treatment under the law for all, and freedom for all.

Our hearts reach out to our Israeli brothers and sisters in compassion and humility. We seek to join the many Israeli and American Jews working for Palestinian rights and freedom. A conscientious objector support group in Israel, New Profile: Movement for the Civilization of Israeli Society asserts: "Israeli culture generates an image of a world in which war was, is and will always be inevitable, a necessary and acceptable way of solving our problems...In such a world it is 'only natural' that decisions makers are former army officers—all of them Jewish males."⁵ Opinion polls consistently show that the majority of Israelis wish to live in peace with Palestinians, albeit in separate countries, and do not support "settlements" or seek a "Greater Israel."⁶

Anticipated Objection 3: The resolution calls the occupation of Palestine (Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem) a sin. Haven't both sides in this conflict sinned?

Supportive Response: The resolution does not say that Israelis are sinners nor that Arab Christians and Muslims are not sinners. Specifically, it says that "Israel's military occupation is sinful." *Israelis and Palestinians have the same universal human rights to live with dignity and opportunity*: To go to school, to better their lives, to provide a home for their families without fear of demolition or forced removal, to travel safely to hospitals and to hold people who have control over their lives accountable through elections. But in the occupied Palestinian territories, Gaza, and the West Bank, four million Palestinians do not have these rights, while 600,000 Jewish Israelis living in illegal settlements do.

*"Israel justifies its actions as self-defence, including occupation, collective punishment and all other forms of reprisals against the Palestinians....Yes, there is Palestinian resistance to the occupation. However, if there were no occupation there would be no resistance, no fear and no insecurity."*⁷

⁵ Read more about New Profile and their anti-militarism work in Israel at <http://www.newprofile.org/english/militarismen>.

⁶ For more on this see Jeff Halper, *Obstacles to Peace: A Reframing of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Jerusalem: Palestine Mapping Center, 2005), p. 31-32.

⁷ Kairos Palestine, "A Moment of Truth, a Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering" (2009), p. 6. <http://www.kaiospalestine.ps/sites/default/files/English.pdf>

In response many Jews both inside and outside of Israel have risen up to protest the debasement of Palestinian lives. Jewish organizations supporting Palestinian rights include B'Tselem, Rabbis for Human Rights, Jewish Voice for Peace, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Boycott From Within, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Women in Black, New Profile, the Zochrot Association, and many others. Palestinian Arab Christians have formed the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Dar Annadwa, and Kairos Palestine to advocate for Justice. Palestinian organizations include Badil, Al Haq, the Wi'am Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center, and Holy Land Trust, among many others.⁸

Anticipated Objection 4: The Mennonite Church should not be involved in political issues that propose alignment with a particular political agenda.

Supportive Response: Mennonites in the U.S. have been building relationships in Palestine-Israel for more than 60 years. An important expression of this work is education and advocacy, drawing attention to suffering and injustice and communicating the stories of Palestinian and Israeli peacebuilders to U.S. audiences and Washington policymakers. This also includes lifting up the voices of Palestinian Christians, for example in the Kairos Palestine call. The Kairos call understands peacebuilding as a shared work for justice and challenges us to work for justice at home, addressing root causes of violence: a work that requires attention to the U.S. role in this conflict, through our financial and military support of Israel's occupation of Palestine; a work that recognizes seeking justice in Palestine-Israel must be complemented by seeking justice at home, actively dismantling structures of oppression such as racism and poverty as well as militarism.

Kairos Palestine points to an issue of justice that transcends politics: The suffering of a people in oppressive circumstances; that points explicitly to the causes of extensive suffering, and what actions can be taken to possibly relieve those conditions. The issue is denial of human rights and the restoration of those rights. We, as Mennonites, are dedicated to nonviolent resistance, following the example of Christ, and sharing in the suffering of those afflicted. Mennonites have already collectively borne witness to the conditions in question and worked on the ground to alleviate these conditions. We are faced with a moment when violence begets violence and the call for people of peace to weigh in with an alternate message of hope is of utmost importance.

It is time to take the next step: Palestinian Christians have issued a Kairos call and we must join denominationally with other Christian bodies and stop our enabling of injustice through our inaction.

Anticipated Objection 5: Why should we go on record with a resolution in regard to Israel-Palestine when other issues are equally pressing?

Supportive response: We believe that Christ calls us to work for peace, justice, and reconciliation in the world. The land of Palestine-Israel is in many ways a microcosm of our world, ancient and modern. The conflict in that small area fuels mistrust and violence throughout the region and the entire globe. More importantly, Mennonites have been sharing experiences and working alongside Palestinians and Israelis for decades, seeking to discover our own

⁸ For more groups see <http://mennopin.org/resources/organizations-2/>.

responsibilities in those relationships. For these reasons we feel specifically called to pray and work for peace in that holy land, as Palestinian Christians have requested.

Many other issues are of similar content to the issue of justice and the search for peace in Palestine, including discrimination and civil rights; tax money for weapons; overuse of prisons; basic human rights of indigenous peoples or other groups that have been summarily removed from their lands; our military presence abroad; wars in the Middle East; the federal budget and the priorities it suggests; immigration and the walled border between the U.S. and Mexico; and destruction of natural resources. Over the years Mennonites have registered concerns with each of these, and all of them relate in some way to the current conditions of the occupation in Palestine.

Anticipated Objection 6: Won't Mennonite Church USA be targeted, harassed and labeled "anti-Semitic"?

Supportive response: *"Critiquing discriminatory and oppressive policies carried out by the State of Israel is not anti-Jewish; many Jews themselves criticize Israel's destructive policies, arguing that house demolitions, land confiscations, and disproportionate use of lethal force are not compatible with Jewish practice and belief. Christians' critiques of Israeli policies should be made in a spirit of humility and should not use anti-Jewish stereotypes when describing the oppressive Israeli practices in the Occupied Territories."*⁹

Our Mennonite brothers and sisters were persecuted, tortured and killed for their faith. Their land was often confiscated, their beliefs and culture outlawed. In all cases, Mennonites responded nonviolently and with resistance to the injustice perpetrated by governments against them. In light of this tradition we say that nonviolence is at the center of Jesus' life and teachings. *Reconciliation must follow any successful efforts to change the oppressor's injustice to the embracing of justice. Without reconciliation people will not live together in peace and mutual respect.* Retaliation or revenge must never be tolerated or followed. Revenge breeds revenge, revenge feeds the chain of never-ending violence and destruction.

It is with love and respect for our Jewish neighbors that we encourage our Christian brothers and sisters to approach with an attitude that both sides are and have been victims. Victims of violence react often from a basis of fear, resentment, and revenge. We must see the face of ourselves in both Israelis and Palestinians. Christian churches have not always been innocent in the past regarding, for example, the treatment of Native Americans, African Americans, Jewish Americans, Japanese Americans, Latin Americans and other racial/ethnic groups in our own country. But we acknowledge the need for repentance for these sins of the past. Many churches have repented of those ways and now seek to speak out concerning current injustice and oppression in the world.

Echoing Sonia Weaver's comments, this statement does not "take sides" for Palestinians and against Israelis, "knowing that both Palestinians and Israelis are children of God made in God's image." Nor does it "take sides" in prayer, but petitions God that "Israelis and Palestinians alike might dwell in God's peace." However, it does encourage us to "take sides"

⁹ Weaver, *What is Palestine-Israel?*, 54.

“with the good news of Christ that reconciliation between enemies is possible and that reconciliation involves doing of justice... “take sides” against all forms of violence, regardless of who perpetrates it... “take sides” against a false neutrality that portrays Palestinians and Israelis as equal parties to the conflict and that avoids the task of identifying military occupation, siege and dispossession as injustice... “takes sides” with courageous Israeli peace groups and nonviolent Palestinian groups who struggle jointly against military occupation and through that struggle form new bonds of solidarity and cooperation.”¹⁰

From the Jewish Voice for Peace Rabbinical Council: *“As rabbis deeply committed to Jews and Judaism, we have seen many things that disturb us regarding Israel’s policy toward Palestinians: Christian and Muslim Palestinian families forcibly removed from their homes, children arrested and beaten, brothers and husbands incarcerated without cause for undetermined periods without recourse to legal services. Our hearts are broken.”¹¹*

Final words

We realize that our resolution presents both a challenge to and a commitment from the Mennonite Church USA. Given the call from Mennonite Church USA’s Executive Board in 2011 for congregations to study the Kairos Palestine document, we believe it is an appropriate next step.

Although naming injustice and oppression, particularly when we as U.S. citizens are complicit in the injustice, is never easy, we believe we are called to do so by Jesus’ life and teachings. The oft-quoted phrase from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice”, is apropos here. Passage of this resolution will join us with other churches who have extended solidarity in this Kairos moment to brothers and sisters suffering from injustice.

¹⁰ Weaver, *What is Palestine-Israel?*, 67-68.

¹¹ Excerpt from a Feb. 2013 letter to Christians from members and friends of the Jewish Voice for Peace Rabbinical Council. To see full text go to: <http://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/nonviolence-and-peacemaking/a-jewish-open-letter-to-participants-in-the-2013-national-religious-broadcasters-convention/>.

Brief history of Mennonite involvement in Palestine-Israel¹²

Mennonites have been building relationships in Palestine-Israel for over 60 years, working alongside Palestinians and Israelis for peace with justice. After the horrors of the Holocaust, many Jews welcomed the creation of the State of Israel, viewing it as a potential safe haven. The establishment of Israel in 1948, however, went hand in hand with the massive dispossession and displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians and the destruction of over 500 Palestinian towns and villages. **Mennonite Central Committee** (MCC) responded in 1949 to this newly created refugee crisis with material assistance and numerous other ways including education and rural development. Another example was selling needlework made by Palestinian refugee women, one of the first products sold by what eventually grew into the alternative trading organization Ten Thousand Villages. Over the years MCC developed bonds of friendship with the Palestinian churches, joining them in their ministry, including partnerships with the Latin Patriarchate School in Zababdeh and the Bethlehem Bible College. Since Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip in 1967, MCC has supported the work of both Palestinians and Israelis committed to non-violence and a future of peace, justice, and reconciliation for both peoples. The MCC Peace Section organized its first study tour to Palestine-Israel in 1969. MCC has continued to organize delegations, currently one each year from the United States and Canada, signaling the significant role of educating North American Mennonites. MCC has produced various periodicals, books, and education resources as well as placed hundreds of workers and volunteers in Palestine-Israel. In 2013, the MCC U.S. Board decided not to invest in companies that benefit from violence against Palestinians, Israelis or others.

Mennonite Mission Network (MMN, then Mennonite Board of Missions) has had a presence in Palestine-Israel since the mid-1950s in conjunction with **Eastern Mennonite Missions** (EMM, then Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities). This work was initially focused on working with the Messianic Jewish movement in Israel. MMN staff currently serve on the faculty of Israel College of the Bible. Since the mid-1960s this work has also included partnering with Palestinian Christian at Nazareth Hospital and schools, as well as helping to establish Nazareth Village, which has seen a steady flow of North American volunteers and visitors.

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) has had a presence in Hebron, in the Occupied West Bank, since 1994. This presence has included school patrols that accompany children, monitoring settler violence and soldier home invasions, and working against home demolitions. CPT supports Palestinian-led nonviolent resistance to Israel's military occupation and educates people in North America. Education campaigns have included the "Campaign for Secure Dwellings" (1997-2000, in whose first year 58 churches were matched with Palestinian families), "Tent for Lent" campaign (March 1999), and "Urgent Action" international letter writing campaigns. CPT organizes several delegations to Palestine every year and endorsed the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign in 2010.

Mennonite educational institutions have exposed hundreds of Mennonite students to the situation in Palestine-Israel through course work and learning tours. **Eastern Mennonite University** (EMU) has had a Middle East Cross-Cultural semester for decades. Both **Bethel College** and **Bluffton University** run a delegation every other year. **Eastern Mennonite Seminary** also organizes regular learning tours. Mennonite college and university campuses have also been the site of student activism over the years. EMU students started a "Students for Morally Responsible Investment" group that organized a student

¹² Prepared by Timothy Seidel and Andre Gingerich Stoner. For more on this history, see Alain Epp Weaver and Sonia K. Weaver, *Salt & Sign: Mennonite Central Committee in Palestine, 1949-1999* (Akron, Pa: Mennonite Central Committee, 1999); Sonia K. Weaver, *What is Palestine-Israel?: Answers to Common Questions* (Scottdale, Pa: Herald Press, 2007); and LeRoy Friesen, *Mennonite Witness in the Middle East: A Missiological Introduction* (Elkhart, Ind: Mennonite Board of Missions, 2000).

Mennonite Church USA Statement on Israel-Palestine Packet

gathering outside of the school's Board of Trustees meeting in November 2010. **Goshen College** students constructed a replica of Israel's separation wall on that campus in February 2011, and several students visited and volunteered in Palestine that summer.

In 2007, **Mennonite Church USA** (MCUSA) organized a delegation of denominational leaders from across its agencies to visit Palestine-Israel with the purpose of engaging the discussion on divestment. As a result, the delegation wrote an Open Letter "Becoming Peacemakers in Israel/Palestine." The Open Letter was presented at the MCUSA 2007 San Jose Convention. In 2011, the MCUSA Executive Board issued a response to Kairos Palestine with a letter to Palestinian Christians as well as a letter to members of Mennonite Church USA. The first "Come and See" trip, initiated by MCUSA Executive Board with funding from MMN, **Everence**, and MCC U.S., took place in 2014 with the goal of sending 100 Mennonite Church leaders on learning tours in five years.

In 2013, a **Mennonite Palestine Israel Network** (MennoPIN) was formed to support advocacy and action, develop and promote educational resources, and join with people of faith and conscience around the world who share a passion for peace with justice in Palestine-Israel. MennoPIN has given particular attention to the Kairos Palestine call and creating space for advocacy and action on the issue of boycott, divestment, and sanctions within Mennonite Church USA.

Resources for Further Learning

Kairos Palestine statements and educational resources

- “Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth, a Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering” (2009). <http://www.kairos-palestine.ps/>
- “Kairos USA: U.S. Response to the Kairos Palestine Document” (2012). <http://kairosusa.org/>
- “Kairos Palestine, a Moment of Truth: Three-week Congregational Study Plan,” Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). http://www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/component/content/article/60/140-kairos-palestine_blank

Mennonite Church USA

- “An Open Letter to Mennonite Church USA Congregations: Becoming Peacemakers in Israel/Palestine” (2007). <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mc-usa-2007-open-letter-becoming-peacemakers-in-israel-palestine.pdf>
- “A Biblical-Theological Reflection on Israel: In Response to the Mennonite Church USA Open Letter to Congregations on Becoming Peacemakers in Israel/Palestine” (2007). <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mc-usa-2007-open-letter-biblical-theological-reflection-on-israel.pdf>
- MCUSA Executive Director Kairos Palestine response to Palestinian Christians (2011). <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mc-usa-2011-kairos-response-to-palestine.pdf>
- MCUSA Executive Director Kairos Palestine response to U.S. Mennonites (2011). <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mc-usa-2011-kairos-response-to-u-s.pdf>
- Come and See Fund, Mennonite Church USA (2013). <http://www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TourCriteria.pdf>

Mennonite Central Committee

- “Peacebuilding in Palestine/Israel: A Discussion Paper” (2005): a discussion paper meant to help facilitate a conversation among North American Mennonites about stewardship, divestment, and economic justice. <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mcc-2005-peacebuilding-in-palestine-israel-discussion-paper.pdf>
- “Mennonite Central Committee Discussion Paper on Palestine-Israel” (2007): a discussion paper based on MCC’s experience in Palestine-Israel. <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mcc-2007-discussion-paper-on-palestine-israel.pdf>
- “Christian Zionism and Peace in the Holy Land,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 35.3 (July-September 2005). <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mcc-ponl-2005-christian-zionism.pdf>
- “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem: U.S. Policy on Israel-Palestine,” *MCC Washington Memo* 42.3 (Fall 2010). <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/mcc-wm-2010-pray-for-the-peace-of-jerusalem.pdf>
- “Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: A Question for the Church,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 42.3 (July-September 2012). <https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mcc-ponl-2012-bds.pdf>

Mennonite related books

- Friesen, LeRoy. 2000. *Mennonite Witness in the Middle East: A Missiological Introduction*. Elkhart, Ind: Mennonite Board of Missions. <http://store.mennomedia.org/Mennonite-Witness-In-Middle-East-P4098.aspx>
- Kern, Kathleen. 2010. *As Resident Aliens: Christian Peacemaker Teams in the West Bank, 1995-2005*. Eugene, Or: Cascade Books. <http://www.amazon.com/As-Resident-Aliens-Christian-Peacemaker/dp/1556352336>
- Weaver, Alain Epp (Ed.). 2007. *Under Vine and Fig Tree: Biblical Theologies of Land and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*. Telford, Pa: Cascadia Pub. House. <http://www.cascadiapublishinghouse.com/uft/uft.htm>
- Weaver, Alain Epp. 2014. *Mapping Exile and Return: Palestinian Dispossession and a Political Theology for a Shared Future*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. <http://www.amazon.com/Mapping-Exile-Return-Palestinian-Dispossession/dp/1451470126>
- Weaver, Alain Epp, and Sonia K. Weaver. 1999. *Salt & Sign: Mennonite Central Committee in Palestine, 1949-1999*. Akron, Pa: Mennonite Central Committee. <http://www.amazon.com/Salt-sign-Mennonite-Committee-Palestine/dp/096830804X>
- Weaver, Sonia K. 2007. *What is Palestine-Israel?: Answers to Common Questions*. Scottdale, Pa: Herald Press. <http://www.amazon.com/What-Palestine-Israel-Sonia-K-Weaver/dp/0836193660>

Mennonite related websites

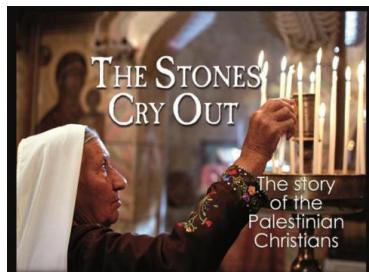
- Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT): cpt.org/work/palestine
- Mennonite Central Committee (MCC): mcc.org/learn/where/middle-east/palestine-israel
- MCC Palestine Update: mccpalestine.wordpress.com
- Mennonite Church USA (MCUSA): mennoniteusa.org/what-we-do/holistic-witness/come-and-see-initiative/
- MCUSA Peace and Justice Support Network: pjsn.org/Israel-Palestine
- Mennonite Palestine Israel Network: mennopin.org

MennoPIN Resource List: Suggested Materials for your Congregation

The following is a brief representation of some of the excellent resources that congregations can use to move further along the path of peace and justice for all those living in Palestine and Israel. And because we all come to the issue from differing perspectives, there is no single starting point. A documentary film followed by a discussion is often the first step for churches; a Sunday School class can easily be organized around a study guide. Whatever you determine for your congregation, the important point is to begin. We all must start somewhere—and there is no better time than now.

To Get Started ...

The Stones Cry Out (DVD)



Christianity was born in Palestine two thousand years ago. From there it spread throughout the Middle East and to the rest of the world. Yet many are unaware Christians still live in the land.

For more than 60 years the Palestinians - Christians and Muslims - have suffered displacement, expulsion, wars, occupation, and oppression. The voices of Palestinian Christians have all too often been drowned out in the turmoil of events.

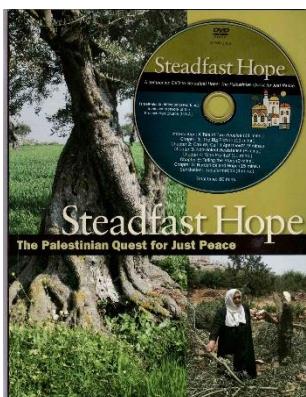
From 1948 up to today, through wars and uprisings, leading Palestinian Christians, including the late President of Beir Zeit University Gabi Baramki, Palestinian leader Hanan Ashrawi, civil society activist Ghassan Andoni, Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah and others recount the unwavering and sometimes desperate struggle of all Palestinians to resist Israel's occupation and stay on their land. 55 minutes.

Available from Middle East Books:

<http://www.middleeastbooks.com/products/the-stones-cry-out-the-story-of-the-palestinian-christians>

Steadfast Hope: The Palestinian Quest for Just Peace (Study Guide)

Expanded second edition, April 2011

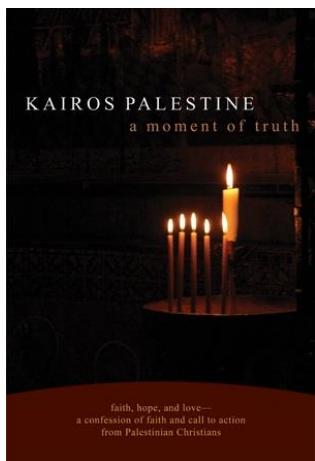


What are the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? What are the common myths and misperceptions about the conflict? What is the role of the US government in the conflict and the peace process? What challenges and opportunities lie ahead in the quest for peace? How can congregations contribute to the cause of just peace for the people who share the Holy Land? Steadfast Hope presents a compelling snapshot of the current situation on the ground, highlighting the tragic human costs of war and occupation. The booklet also offers an inspiring view of cooperation among Muslim, Jewish, and Christian peacemakers working for justice and reconciliation. This 48-page, richly illustrated booklet is accompanied by a free companion DVD with short segments for group viewing and discussion. The booklet also includes a study guide for weekly lesson plans.

Available from the Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church USA:

<http://www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/study-resources/publications>

Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth (Study Guide)



In 2009, Palestinian Christian leaders wrote a “word to the world about what is happening in Palestine.” It is a call for Christians around the world to recognize the struggles of the Palestinian people and to stand with them against injustice. The Mennonite Church USA responded to the document with the following letter, urging Mennonite congregations to read and discuss it together:

[https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mc-usa-2011-kairos-response-to-u-s.pdf](https://mennopin.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mc-usa-2011-kairos-response-to-us.pdf)

The introduction states that the document was “requests the international community to stand by the Palestinian people who have faced oppression, displacement, suffering and clear apartheid for more than six decades. The suffering continues while the international community silently looks on at the occupying State, Israel. 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 in our region, calling on them to revisit theologies that justify crimes perpetrated against our people and the dispossession of the land.”

The document can be downloaded from the Kairos website: <http://www.kaiospalestine.ps/>

A three-session study guide is available from the Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church USA: <http://www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/study-resources/publications>

A six-session study guide is available from Kairos USA: <http://kairosusa.org/study-guide/>

A study guide from a Mennonite perspective is forthcoming. Keep posted!

For Further Study ...

With God on Our Side (DVD)



With God On Our Side takes a look at the theology of Christian Zionism, which teaches that because the Jews are God’s chosen people, they have a divine right to the land of Israel. Aspects of this belief system lead some Christians in the West to give uncritical support to Israeli government policies, even those that privilege Jews at the expense of Palestinians, leading to great suffering among Muslim and Christian Palestinians alike and threatening Israel’s security as a whole.

This film demonstrates that there is a biblical alternative for Christians who want to love and support the people of Israel, a theology that doesn’t favor one people group over another but instead promotes peace and reconciliation for both Jews and Palestinians. 1 hour, 22 min.

See website to purchase the video. Website includes a free study guide with seven sessions for use with the video. <http://www.withgodonourside.com/>

Zionism Unsettled: A Congregational Study Guide (Study Guide)



What role have Zionism and Christian Zionism played in shaping attitudes and driving historical developments in the Middle East and around the world? How do Christians, Jews, and Muslims understand the competing claims to the land of Palestine and Israel? What steps can be taken to bring peace, reconciliation, and justice to the homeland that Palestinians and Israelis share?

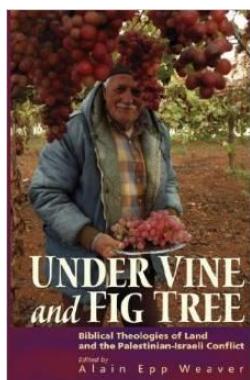
Zionism Unsettled embraces these critical issues fearlessly and with inspiring scope. The booklet and companion DVD draw together compelling and diverse viewpoints from Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Israel, Palestine, the US, and around the globe. By contrasting mainstream perceptions with important alternative perspectives frequently ignored in the media, Zionism Unsettled is an invaluable guide to deeper understanding.

Released in January 2014 to immediate critical acclaim, Zionism Unsettled consists of a 74-page illustrated booklet and a free companion DVD.

A how-to guide for class leaders and focused discussion prompts make it an ideal resource for multi-week exploratory education programs in churches, mosques, synagogues, and all classroom settings.

Available from the Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church USA:
<http://www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/study-resources/publications>

Under Vine and Fig Tree: Biblical Theologies of Land and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict



Alain Epp Weaver, ed.

Rooted in Mennonite Central Committee's nearly six decades of work alongside Palestinians and Israelis, *Under Vine and Fig Tree* examines ways in which the Bible has been used to justify violence and dispossession and ways it can be received as a life-giving word for Palestinians and Israelis wishing to live securely under their own vines and fig trees.

Available from Cascadia House:

<http://www.cascadiapublishinghouse.com/uft/uftauth.htm>

Additional Resources ...

For additional resources: <http://mennopin.wordpress.com/resources>

(December 29, 2014)