

Introduction to the Israeli Occupation

A first step for Christians to fulfill the calling of peacemakers: discovering the roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the current reality of the Israeli occupation, and fellow Christians' call for help.

A Moment of Truth for All Christians

For decades, Christians living in the Holy Land have endured a harsh military occupation that has become an apartheid regime. In December 2009, they issued a powerful call to the global Church - to take concrete action to help them regain their freedom - in ***Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth***. Drawing upon the legacy of the South African *Kairos Document*, endorsed by the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Palestine, and inspired by God's grace and love, *Kairos Palestine* is a profound statement of faith, a vivid description of life under occupation, and a call to action for Christians everywhere - to help bring freedom, equality, and a lasting peace to all the people of Israel and Palestine. **In their own words, excerpts from *Kairos Palestine*:** *"The Israeli occupation is an evil and a sin that must be resisted and removed...love puts an end to evil by walking in the ways of justice....Taking action to end the oppression is not working against Israel....It will benefit both peoples, when justice and the peace that comes from that are secured for all the people of the Holy Land....Our word to the churches of the world is a call to stand alongside the oppressed....Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for that is the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security, and love."*



The UMC Cross and Flame painted on the Separation Wall in Palestine. The words on the wall read: "God will destroy this wall" and "Walls are temporary, just ask Berlin!"

A Brief Historical Synopsis

1897 World Zionist Organization is founded by Theodor Herzl in Basle "to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, secured under public law." About 6% of Palestine is Jewish at this time. **1917** In the Balfour Declaration, the U.K.'s Foreign Secretary approves a national home for Jews in Palestine, which is not the U.K.'s to give. **1946 (map)** Large waves of Jewish settlers have emigrated to Palestine. Though Jews now constitute one third of the population, 85% to 90% of the land is owned by Palestinians. **1947 (map)** The new, inexperienced U.N. adopts a proposal to divide Palestine into two states, against the wishes of two thirds of the population, the Palestinians.



1948 On May 14th, the Jewish community in Palestine declares itself the new State of Israel. The ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, including massacres, had already begun. Arab states intervene and the first Arab-Israeli war begins. **1949 (map)** The Armistice gives Israel 78% of Palestine - the current internationally recognized borders of Israel. Israel denies Palestinian refugees their right under international law to return to their homes and erases hundreds of villages. **1967** On June 5th, Israel's pre-emptive strike initiates the Six Day War with neighboring countries. Afterward, Israel occupies Gaza and the West Bank, among other lands. The U.N. Security Council, including the U.S., unanimously calls for Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. **Present (map):** Palestinian leaders have formally accepted the State of Israel. During decades of the "peace process," Israel has ignored the U.S., the U.N., and the Geneva Conventions that it signed, colonizing the West Bank and leaving fragments for Palestinians. Israel has withdrawn settlers from Gaza, but, due to hostilities with Hamas, has kept it under a devastating blockade that continues in 2015. As defined by international law, this blockade is a military occupation, as well as illegal collective punishment of a civilian population.

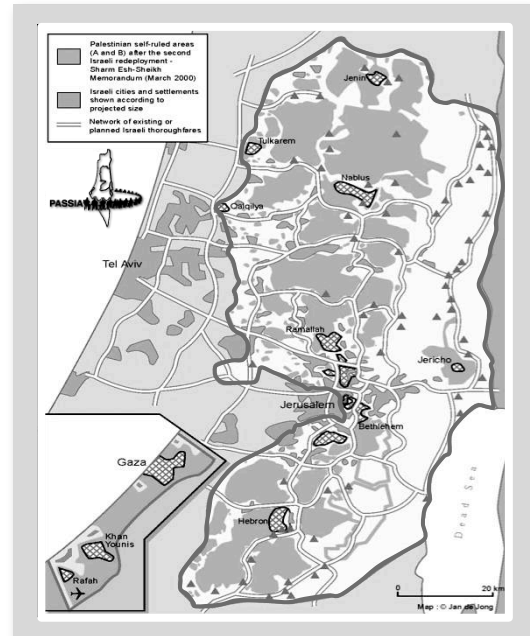
Building Settlements, Destroying Homes and Land

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An apartheid regime of segregated land and highways fragments Palestinian land in the West Bank into isolated cantons without connection to one another, making the goal of a viable Palestinian state impossible.

The Israeli occupation began after the Six Day War in June 1967, when Israel seized military control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. These areas equal just 22% of Palestine as it existed before 1948. They are outside Israel's internationally recognized borders and are the only areas where Palestinians seek to establish a state. According to the Fourth Geneva Convention, which Israel signed, any colonization of those lands is illegal. Since 1967, however, Israel has intensively built colonies called "settlements" in occupied territory, which includes East Jerusalem, and has encouraged over 650,000 settlers to move there illegally - a serious, ongoing violation of international law and an enormous obstacle to peace between the two peoples.

(Right) Within the dark gray border is the West Bank; all of the lightest area is completely controlled by Israel. The ever-expanding Israeli settlements, the Separation Wall, and a highway system that only Israelis may use (the white lines running throughout) have left Palestinians with a small fraction of their remaining territory, cut into virtual "islands" that are disconnected from one another and the world.



Source: globalresearch.ca

(Left) Building the settlements, segregated roads, and the Separation Wall requires large-scale land confiscation and destruction of Palestinian homes and agriculture. Since 1967, over 27,000 Palestinian structures have been demolished, leaving hundreds of thousands of Palestinians homeless. (Left bottom) Thousands of acres of farmland and an estimated 1 million olive trees – crucial to the Palestinian economy – have been destroyed.



Over 30 ancient trees are uprooted at Ras A Tira to make way for the Separation Wall. Photo: yisraelpm, CC BY YouTube



Photo: Activestills.org

Palestinian families can never feel safe from threats to their homes. They know when the bulldozers show up, they will have only a few minutes' notice to grab their possessions. Extended families with small children and elderly parents often must take refuge nearby in caves, tents, or makeshift structures and watch others harvest and rebuild on land that had been in their family for generations.

Restricting Movement, Creating Prisons

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The Separation Wall, checkpoints, and barriers throughout the West Bank turn Palestinian communities into open-air prisons, tightly controlling an oppressed population while their land is illegally colonized.



Photo: Gary Fields

A 25-foot-high cement wall imprisons the residents of Bethlehem, cutting them off from their own agricultural land and the world.

The Separation Wall, which Israel says is for its security, is not built on the border between Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territory; 85% of the Wall's route is on Palestinian land, and much of it extends deep inside the West Bank. In reality, the Wall is illegally annexing Palestinian land to Israel. In 2004, the International Court of Justice stated that the Wall is illegal and called for all portions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to be dismantled.

There are also hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks in occupied territory; they separate Palestinian villages and families from each other, jobs, hospitals, and their own farmland. Like the Wall, most checkpoints are not on the border with Israel and not for Israel's security.



Photo: Dylan Collins

Workers line up many hours before dawn, hoping they'll be allowed through that day, to reach their jobs and provide for their families.



Photo: Anna Baltzer; annainthemiddleeast.com

Interminable delays at checkpoints make normal life impossible. Driving a few kilometers in occupied territory often takes hours, strangling the Palestinian economy and affecting every facet of life.



Woman with dying baby is forced to transfer between ambulances to get through a checkpoint.

Photo: Tamar Flieshman; MchasmWatch.org

Palestinians live with the constant fear that in an emergency they will not be able to reach a hospital. Many patients have died or suffered irreversible setbacks at checkpoints; dozens of newborns have died when their mothers had to give birth there. Such policies should be unthinkable in a civilized society, even for the inmates of an actual prison.



Hedy Epstein, Holocaust survivor and human rights advocate:

"I was really not prepared for all the horrors that I saw. I had heard about checkpoints. And I thought a checkpoint was something like a tollbooth on a highway here in the United States. It's not like that at all. And it's gotten worse every time I return. The way they are now, they remind me of when animals are rounded up and taken to slaughter, it's just so humiliating."

Denying Water, Endangering Lives

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"Water is a basic need and a right, but for many Palestinians obtaining even poor quality, subsistence-level quantities of water has become a luxury that they can barely afford." Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International



Photo: Angela Godfrey-Goldstein, The Jahalin Association



Photo: IfAmericansKnew.org



Photo: israeltraveler

Israel controls all water in the Occupied Territories, and water restrictions have created a humanitarian crisis for Palestinians. Israeli settlers are able to use four times as much water per person as Palestinians, and settlements have swimming pools, green lawns, and lush gardens (see three photos at left).

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have no access to running water. Even in places connected to the water network, the taps often are cut off - sometimes for weeks or even months. Israel allots only 15% to 20% of the available water to the Palestinians and will not allow them to develop other water resources. Israel also charges Palestinians in the West Bank exorbitant rates (not applied to settlers) for water that comes from Palestinian territory.

In blockaded Gaza, the underground aquifer is depleted and contaminated - more than 90% of the water supply is unfit for human consumption.

(Below) The Israeli Army has filled a Palestinian cistern with rocks and an old car; every year, Israel destroys dozens of cisterns and wells Palestinians need to collect water.

"The Government of Israel uses water to target some of the most vulnerable Palestinian communities. Such destruction is not only without justification; it is morally reprehensible. Few examples highlight more forcefully the suffering and injustice Palestinians face under occupation."

Dr. Shaddad Attali, Palestinian Water Authority



Photo: Land Research Center, lrcj.org

(Two photos at right)
Hundreds of villages and towns in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are not provided with reliable running water; here children collect water for their families from an outdoor pipe and a cistern.



Photo: B'Tselem, btselem.org



Photo: B'Tselem; btselem.org