NAKBA DAY 2018

A COMMITMENT FROM SOUTH AFRICAN CHRISTIANS CONFRONTING ISRAEL'S END-GAME FOR PALESTINIANS

A JOURNEY IN LOVE, COMPASSION AND HOPE: In pursuit of a just peace, freedom, dignity, security and democracy for all in historic Palestine

Things on the ground worsen with each passing day. .. To many it has become stale news to learn that the situation in Palestine is deteriorating. A deterioration that has seemingly became "normalized" as if it is an unstoppable natural process of history... In our experience and assessment thereof, Palestine and Palestinians could just as well be entering or have already entered a historically definable endgame-phase towards the "successful" completion of the Zionist apartheid project of occupation: the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their homeland. One of the consequences of such population transfer would be the removal of the Christian presence from the Holy Land and in particular the presence of the decedents of the first Christians.

Extract from the Kairos Palestine Letter to the global Christian community, February 2018

The century-long process of "judaization" has been virtually completed. We are at the cusp of the final dismembering of Palestine.

Given international realities, Israel's ability to expand onto all the territory it wants while relieving itself of a disenfranchised Palestinian population is not outside of the realm of possibility.

Prof Jeff Harper

The Burden of a prophet: "Lord, why do you allow me to see injustice?" (Habakuk 1:3)

PALESTINE, THE HOLY LAND, IS IN CRISIS

The current crisis in the Holy Land needs the most urgent and exceptionally courageous attention.

We as authors hereby launch an initiative and commitment from within the South African Christian community to be actively part of confronting this crisis.

For us, the crisis in Historic Palestine is:

- Palestinians now face obliteration of their future, an "end-game" phase of their "Nakba",
- Israel is in self-destruct mode.
- The world, and South Africa, say: Crisis? What crisis?
- Christians are putting the Gospel message at stake, in the land where it originated from.

Core to this crisis are mixtures of disinformation, lack of knowledge, ignorance, denial, fear, anger and hatred together with hopes and dreams a different future and resilience to achieve a just peace.

We are stuck in doing what we are used to do... and expect different results. We need to see beyond ideological and doctrinal battles. We have to move beyond activism and politics-as-usual.

Something out of the ordinary has to happen.

Love and compassion for each other are not mere doctrines and confessions of religion. It is not Valentine's Day messages.

Love and compassion are the hard slog and realities in people's lives, in real activism, and deep politics. Love and compassion are the most radical agents to pierce superficial messages of comfort that create lies. Love and compassion are states of being and simultaneously real acts and practical ways of life. Love and compassion define our spiritual and faith communities. It certainly does for Christianity. Love and compassion are radical interventions on the very concrete and practical way to real transformation and healing.

Transformation happens outside of and beyond our comfort zones. Transformation is a courageous journey away from what is familiar and outside of that which we know and remember so well. It is a radical journey into the unknown and into spaces where there are no or hardly any understanding nor memories of what we face and what we have to do. Moving away from being autocratic to being democratic is such an example.

The crisis in historic Palestine has to be faced by all of us, for everyone. Most if not all of us are somehow part of the problem, and also part of the solution. In love and compassion, nobody is excluded if we are part of the problem. Also nobody is excluded from being part of transformation and healing.

We hereby launch a specific South African initiative in facing the crisis in the historic Palestine: The Holy Land.

We are:

- part of the Christian community in South Africa. We share personal histories of challenging injustice in South Africa, the world and for the planet. We are deeply concerned and committed to a just peace in the Holy Land. We are concerned for all who live there and for all connected to the land,
- inspired by our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters who show us what real faith, love and hope is. They demonstrate real Christianity in a situation where faith, hope and love are hardly recognizable also towards "the enemy".¹ We want to hold up their hands and their hearts and that of all Palestinians, for themselves and for their role in human history. We, even in resistance, want to remind Jewish Israelis and others that they should be and could be a blessing to the world,
- part of the body of Christian grassroots communities in historic Palestine and a growing network of international initiatives, including Christian initiatives, towards a just peace in the Holy Land.

We are driven by:

- a pursuit for a just peace, freedom, dignity, security and democracy for all in historic Palestine,
- a journey in which injustice will be overcome by love, compassion and hope as deliberate and explicit driving forces in processes of change,
- our bias for justice against injustice. In resistance to injustice we are prepared to stand "at the coalface" where justice and injustice meet, and
- solidarity with all who suffered and are daily suffering injustice. Our Palestinian sisters and brothers have called for "costly solidarity".

PALESTINIANS' NAKBA: COLONIALISM, APARTHEID, OCCUPATION, AND ETHNIC CLEANSING

The "conflict" between the State of Israel and Palestinians is not merely about people with histories of animosity. Today the conflict is one between oppressors and oppressed. The crime of oppression has names in international law and in morality: Colonialism, Apartheid, Occupation and Ethnic Cleansing.

"Nakba" is the Arabic word for *"catastrophe"*. Nakba Day, 15 May, annually commemorates the catastrophe that befell historic Palestine and all Palestinians during Israel's so-called *"War of Independence"* before and after the establishment of the State of Israel. The Nakba still continues.

In 1948, more than 450 villages were destroyed. The villagers were removed from their homes, cities and land into exile or were internally displaced.

The Nakba continues incrementally ever since.

Almost seventy percent of Palestinians live either in diaspora outside historic Palestine or in refugee camps, in Gaza and the West Bank, or, as internally displaced within Israel's 'Green Line'. The Green Line is the 1949 armistice line which became Israel's boundary line.

Brutal, systemic, ethnic and race-based discrimination is daily perpetrated against Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.

The theft of water and property, destruction of houses and wells, confiscation of village springs,

¹ Palestine Kairos document (2009): A MOMENT OF TRUTH - A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering (http://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-us/kairos-palestine-document)

forced removal of communities, imprisonment without trial, and illegal appropriation of land and the building of Jewish settlements are daily experiences. Gaza remains locked in a life-killing blockade. The so-called "Security Wall" is an Apartheid Wall: a means of land theft, humiliation, oppression and creating a physical division between Israeli Jews and Palestinians and between Palestinians. Ultimately it is a means of dispossessing land.

The Palestinian people also have an internationally agreed Right of Return of exiles, displaced and dispossessed people. Jewish people from all over the world (with no direct personal link to the country) are granted the right of land and of citizenship of Israel with all the preferential political, social and economic benefits. It is a terrible irony that at this time of Israel's founding, Jewish people in Europe who had not been killed in the genocide were themselves refugees.

Apartheid is not dead and buried: not in South Africa and not in the Holy Land. Apartheid is also is globally supported and justified. Why does this continue if International Humanitarian Law regards systemic racial discrimination – Apartheid – as a crime against humanity², be that South African Apartheid or Israeli Apartheid. The same crime by a different actor and different motive does not make it right or less of a crime or no crime at all. Apartheid is Apartheid.

Complete ethnic cleansing is essential to Israel's apartheid project. The motive is to occupy and gather land. Systemic destruction of Palestinian society, culture and even to remove memories of history form part of the Palestinians' ethnic cleansing. Exclusive privileges for Israeli Jews have had to be established and consolidated in all of historic Palestine under terms such as "Judaization".

In the Galilee, for example, the erstwhile and now destroyed Palestinian village of Lubya now has a Hebrew name: "Lavi".

Israel's continued and illegal military occupation of Palestine – coupled with apartheid policies and practices renders her a modern project of colonial conquest.

Voices from Palestine, including from Palestinian Christian communities, say that Palestinians are in reality facing a clearly definable moment in the history of the Nakba: *the final stage(s), end-game phases, of their ethnic cleansing.*

The world and South Africa, particularly the South African and international Christian community, have in effect – and conveniently – ignored these voices.

ISRAELI APARTHEID: A GLOBAL REALITY

In 1948, towards the end of the British mandate, British representatives denied the atrocities of Jewish terror groups in historic Palestine. Later, UN representatives again looked the other way. The world, South Africa, and the Christian community are aware or could have been aware of details regarding the oppression of Palestinians.

International support for and complicity in Israeli Apartheid go deeper than mere political and economic support. By whatever motivation, support for Apartheid and oppression contravenes humanitarian law. It violates and destroys our innermost moral conscience.

The very nature of our shared global complicity renders Israeli Apartheid a global reality to which we are all accountable.

A holistic global strategy is urgently required.

² Relevant international law includes the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (adopted in 1973 and enacted in 1976); and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7 (1)(h) & (j), and Article 2 (g) & (h) of 1998.

The apartheid regime and society was in full recognition, support and cooperation with Israel's policies and practices.

Everything changed with the victories of democracy in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Therefore, much is (still) expected from post-Apartheid South Africa in overcoming Israeli Apartheid. However, as a country (government, political parties, civil society, business, sport bodies, media houses, etc.), we have not admitted Israeli Apartheid nor have we been a major force in overcoming Israeli Apartheid.



Nowhere, albeit by default, is our complicity symbolically and otherwise more evident than by the mere existence of *"South Africa Forest"* in the Galilee.

South Africa Forest was planted over the ruins of the Palestinian village of Lubya to cover, hide and most heinously attempt to remove all memory of what had happened there in 1948. This forest carries our name. Our flag waves over the land and ruins of Lubya. Images of our flag appear on signposts.

Our name and national symbols feature next to the name, logo and flag of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) or "*Keren Kayemeth LeYishrael*" (KKL), translated as: "*Perpetual Fund for the Jewish People in Israel*". (See Photos inserted) The KKL/JNF represents and symbolizes the core of Israeli Apartheid: ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. It now seemingly owns the land of Lubya, like most other public lands in Israel, exclusively for Jewish people... in perpetuity.

This is a national scandal for all of South Africa. It is not an issue for the Jewish community only.

We honour South African Jews and others who have brought this scandal to our attention. The award winning documentary "*The Village Under the Forest*" (2013 by two South African Jews, Mark Kaplan and Heidi Grunebaum, tells our story in Lubya and beyond. We also honour the special courage of South African Jews who stood up with a pledge of resistance towards this scandal and who have thereby already taken profound steps to engage with Palestinian descendants of Lubya and in resistance to the KKL/JNF.

This initiative has to become a broad South African engagement.

CHRISTIAN COMPLICITY

Christians' relationship with historic Palestine is deeply linked to the history leading to Jesus's ministry, the beginnings of Christianity and the spread of the Christian message.

Many communities have to face scandals concerning the people of historic Palestine.

Christians will have to face our own scandals. These include the atrocities of the Crusades, Islamophobia, as well as centuries of anti-Semitism, ghettoization, expulsion and the physical persecution of Jewish people in the name of Christianity. We also have to face the role of Christians in perpetrating and supporting the Holocaust.

We now also confront the scandal of our overall lack of commitment to justice concerning the plight of Palestinians today. We remain silent, we feign solidarity through neutrality and "balanced approaches" to what is happening here. We Biblically justify Israel's Apartheid. We act in misplaced loyalty to the modern state of Israel, whom we regard as the Biblical Israel, regardless what they do. Today the greatest supporters of Zionism and the Israeli regime are Christian, not least because of a skewed and racist misinterpretation of the end-times doctrine of Jesus's Second Coming.

We ourselves, have put the integrity and credibility of the Christian message at stake in the Holy Land.

The ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the skewed reaction of the international Christian community put both the witness and presence of Palestinian Christians at tremendous risk. How can they and their witness to the "Good news" be credible if the Christian message has become a harbinger of death and destruction to Palestinians and to Palestinian Christians? How will they sustain their presence as Palestinians and as descendants of the first Christians?

The Christian complicity in support of the Israeli Colonial Apartheid State occurs **despite** a history of bold South African and international Christian prophetic witness and action against Colonialism and South African Apartheid.

Have we forgotten the deep existential crises of the oppressed to be Christians and to share in the black experience of Apartheid as Biblically justified? Have we forgotten the painful crises of faith of white South African Christians in having to face complicity in using to Bible to oppress fellow South Africans? In this context, Apartheid was called a crime and a sin. The theological justification

thereof was regarded as an abomination of the Gospel: a heresy. Some Christians and Churches announced a moment in which the Gospel and the Christian faith had to be defended against unjust policies regarded as God's will. Some took the matter to the strongest possible opposition to and rejection of such interpretations of the Bible. A confession of faith, *"The Belhar Confession"* (1986), was adopted by some black Churches.

The consequences of Christian complicity to IApartheid are clear for all who have willing ears to hear and eyes to see, difficult and even painful as it might be. Why do we deny it in the Holy Land?

MESSAGES FOR NAKBA DAY 2018

We are painfully aware that Palestinians, and thereby Palestinian Christians as well, understandably feel: *Palestine and Palestinians, you are on your own. Take responsibility!*

Whilst some may feel despondent, others do state that there is "one last chance for peace". They blink not. Neither dare us.

To Palestinians

2018 is the year in which your resistance to Israeli Apartheid focuses on the denial of the universal human rights of Palestinians. We hereby support the 2018 Great Return March. We deeply mourn the deaths in the senseless and heinous killing and wounding of unarmed protesters by snipers.

We humbly admit our overall lack of adequate and effective support to you in the past, despite your support to us during our struggle against South African apartheid.

We are inspired by your *sumud* ("resilience") in the face of gross injustice, including 70 years of Apartheid, Colonialism, Occupation and Ethnic Cleansing. We acknowledge that your *sumud* is also a courageous moral and existential response in which non-violent resistance is embodied in your dignified refusal to cower, to move, to leave, or to stop living. And now we take our stand alongside you in this new and crucial moment in the crisis of your Nakba.

We will march with you beyond 15th May 2018. Hold us and all others to account. Be brave in that as well.

To Palestinians and initiatives in solidarity with Palestine

We applaud and honour many diplomatic and citizens' initiatives, especially grass-roots initiatives, in solidarity with the plight of Palestinians including from within the Christian community.

Particular reference has to be made to positions taken and initiatives launched from within sections of the Jewish community (religious and otherwise) both in Israel and internationally ... often with great sacrifice. This willingness to be publicly ostracized, scorned as traitors and even religiously cursed, are familiar to those of us in South Africa, who resisted Apartheid and particularly those from within "the laager" of the white community and white privilege. Yet, even so, you represent nothing short of a special kind of courage that is so different from what it took some in South Africa to resist apartheid from within "the laager" community.

In South Africa, credit has to go to initiatives from within the Muslim community in bringing the plight of Palestinians to South Africans' attention.

After many years of tireless solidarity work, all of these initiatives are taking root and start showing results. The Israeli regime and its supporters know and feel this ... and it shows. Creating the dark hour before dawn of day is part of self-destruction. For us the destruction of injustice has to happen. The destruction and worse the self-destruction of fellow humans is not an option either. We cannot sit back and watch this to happen.

Be careful how the resistance to injustice is waged. The way resistance is conducted directly impacts on what happens when freedom is achieved. Our behavior in struggle for freedom must shape the forms of love, dignity, equality and freedom we dream of and endeavor to bring about.

Acknowledge that all of us have the propensity, ability and history about abuse of power and to oppress others.

Therefore, ensure we embrace and internalize that which we are standing for, our dreams of a just peace, much stronger and much clearer than our knowing of the injustice that we resist.

Those who experience injustice have an unforgettably deep knowing and understanding thereof. Injustice is a deep physical, emotional and spiritual experience. Victims of injustice literally know injustice from the inside out. This is a strength and strategic advantage in struggles for justice.

There is, however, a tragic irony of history to this. All of us have to be on our guard.

The irony is that, if left unchecked, we effectively also internalize the very injustice that we resist. The tragedy is, more often than not, we internalize the injustice much more and much clearer than our ideals and dreams of a different future. When victories arrive with the freedom it brings, we then act out that which we internalized.

Afrikaners, in essence and even worse, did to black South Africans what the British had done to them. Many liberation heroes become dictators. Israel justifies its actions against Palestinians by using the crime of genocide perpetrated against Jewish people in the WWII. And so the cycle of history repeats itself whereby the oppressed become the next generations of oppressors.

Remain steadfast. Be wise. Be of good courage. We and many others in growing numbers stand with you.

To the Muslim Community

In South Africa we did not listen to your voices about the plight of Palestine nor do we hear how degrading and insulting Islamophobia is. Shall we walk the road of healing and transformation together and thereby also the path of right thinking and right action with regard to the current crisis in Palestine?

How do we as two faith communities and more importantly, as fellow human beings, address Islamophobia?

We commit to working against the rising tide of Islamophobia globally and in our society that has raised its head across the world.

To the Jewish Community

You have said it over and over again that the history of Christian anti-Semitism is the longest, most brutal and most remembered form of persecution Jews have faced! Own it.

In shame we profusely apologise for Christian involvement in histories of persecution, pogroms, expulsions, forced conversions and other forms of anti-Semitic violence. This includes Christian involvement and complicity with the Holocaust. We cannot change the past, but we can acknowledge and work on it. We commit to walk a path of acknowledgement, unburdening and healing.

We also say, with the greatest of respect and sensitivity that you also may need healing from the wounds of your recent past. South Africa and South Africans and many others need that as well. Shall we walk this path together?

To all of us

In some way or another we are complicit in the current injustices in the Holy Land.

Stop doing it ...to Palestinians, to ourselves, to our children and theirs. Unless we change, our children and their children will have to live with the shame of our inaction: what we have not done and what we are not doing. We put them in the invidious position whereby they will have to shame us. Ultimately, in the name of all that is meaningful and sacred to us, make the right choice *now*: Help end the occupation! Help dismantle Israeli Apartheid! Stop the Nakba!

Some of us know from personal experience how excruciatingly difficult such a change of direction may be.

Have courage. Change is possible. Safe spaces and processes of unburdening have helped many of us and may be considered as a part of our overall strategies for justice.

All of us need healing. Also those, particularly in Europe, who find resistance to Israel extremely difficult, if not impossible, because of historical guilt about the Holocaust. Tragically, it is Palestinians who are now paying for this guilt. Guilt is no reason to cover up injustice nor to support it. Guilt can be healed.

Criticism against the atrocities of the modern nation-state of Israel is not anti-Semitic. In fact, such truth-speaking is urgently demanded.

Fellow Christians: For God's sake, please understand that the modern state of Israel is not the Biblical Israel.

Freedom for Israeli Jews is intrinsically linked to the freedom of Palestinians. The destruction of Palestinians is intrinsically linked to the self-destruction of Israel and of Israeli Jews, and dreams of freedom, security and dignity.

History, also our own, has shown that imperial, colonial and other forms of autocratic rule hold the seed of self-destruction. Nobody, not even powerful Emperors, has ever held the power over the germination and growth of this seed. That seed could however be transformed to become a medicinal plant for healing and transformation for the greater good of all. That is in our God-given power.

For our common humanity and global community

With Nelson Mandela we say: "Never, never and never again".

The cycle of history whereby victims of injustice become the next oppressors has to be broken, overcome and transcended. Such is the essence of a just peace.

No more structural violence against anyone, no more nurturing of hatred and fear, no more viewing of the other as the enemy.

Historic Palestine can still – even now! - become a prime example of realized hope, an inspirational window to the joy of reconciliation and joint labor for the prize of a shared just peace.

The window of opportunity is fast closing to become such a profound blessing to the world and to world history ...

A new world, a new earth and a new humanity beyond what we know and remember is possible and will become reality. A different historic Palestine is possible, because she exists. She exists in the brave and longing hearts of many.

We want to step into the reality of that dream....regardless.

Wake up and dream! Courageously do what this dangerous moment in time requires from us!

We as a group:

- Reiterate the urgency of the moment regarding the end-game phase(s) of Palestinian ethnic cleansing from historical Palestine. This dreadful moment has to inform and motivate our hearts, minds and actions.
- Acknowledge that the needs and desires for freedom, security and dignity belong to all who live in historic Palestine.
- Admit that post-South Africa as a country and we as citizens have been anything but a major force in the continued struggles against Israeli Colonialism and Apartheid. We have to without any delay! put that weak-spine and weak-spirited attitude behind us.
- As Christians confess and openly address histories of scandals in the Holy Land and towards people of the Holy Land. We also confess that we have done but very little to point out and oppose the misunderstandings of Christian Zionism on whose teachings and actions the successful marketing of Israeli Zionism to such a large extent depends, and which has borne such bitter fruit. In this regard, too, we will do all we are able to in order to help inform and correct these misunderstandings within the Christian community, especially in South Africa.
- Commit to stand with Palestinians and all who resist Israeli Apartheid, towards a just peace and democracy in historic Palestine to the benefit of all living there. Our - even fierce - resistance constitute a journey in acts of love and compassion.
- Commit to be part of a comprehensive initiative towards a just peace in historic Palestine. Something in the extraordinary, even something never before done in history, will have to surface.

We hereby commit ourselves to the following and by the same token urge and challenge South Africa (government, political parties, civil society, media, educational institutions, sport bodies. Churches and business, as well as any other role players) that we:

- Formally regard Israel as a colonial apartheid state. If other countries even at this late hour choose to remain silent, for South Africa such an attempt at "neutrality" has become impossible.
- Acknowledge and to the benefit of Palestine, Israel and all of us uphold the history of Palestinian Nakba. This history and daily reality may no longer be kept hidden away under a shield of duplicity....to the benefit of Palestine, Israel and all of us.
- NOW be seen as taking up our moral, historical and internationally legal responsibility in support of Palestinians plight and in decisive resistance to Israel's Colonial Apartheid in historic Palestine and globally by:
 - Ensuring that a principled, holistic and comprehensive South African strategy and programs are developed as of utmost urgency. In this matter there is no middle ground.
 - Accepting our historical obligation and role in embarking on all possible peaceful measures against Israeli Apartheid here and globally, including that of boycotts divestments and sanctions. Christians and others will, for example, have to consider alternatives to the way Holy Land tourism and pilgrimages are taking place. Such alternatives are available.
 - Respectful of the right of the oppressed to defend themselves, we emphasise that violent resistance will always be a last resort... towards the ending of all violence. A challenge to all of us.

- · Address our national scandal concerning Lubya, by:
 - Officially distancing our country from having South Africa's name and national symbols attached to "South Africa Forest" by having these publicly removed from the forest and the recreation park.
 - Actively affirm Lubya's descendants' and all Palestinians' Right of Return, and avail government and other funds towards restoring Lubya in cooperation with representatives of the descendants of Lubya and organizations supporting them.
 - Start processes towards declaring the presence and activities of the KKL or as it is known as the Jewish National Fund (JNF) to be illegal in South Africa and internationally.

The JNF's evidently active pursuit of systemic social and ecological racism is violating international humanitarian law and violates our constitution. It should thereby be declared illegal in South Africa. Cooperation with and support for the JNF should equally be declared unconstitutional and thereby illegal

- Practically and in the immediate term:
 - Denounce and actively address the Israeli government's war crimes, including the recent killing and wounding of unarmed protesters in Gaza.
 - Support the Great Return March and affirm as a basic right Palestinians' Right of Return and, in particular, their right to reclaim illegally dispossessed land.
 - Be seen as denouncing and lending support for international resistance against the American "deal of the century", including the exclusive control of Jerusalem by a Jewish state, and moving the USA embassy to Jerusalem. The seed of self-destruction is showing up.
 - Ensure that the South African embassy in Tel Aviv, Israel, be downgraded with immediate effect, including the recall of the South African ambassador in Israel until the government of Israel adheres to international humanitarian law. Something small can have massive effects.
 - Support the establishment of an unburdening process with regards to support for and participation in Israeli Colonial Apartheid and the Nakba. In addition, Christians also have to face the violence related to the Crusades, Islamophobia, as well as ensuing centuries of anti-Semitic persecutions and the Holocaust.

* * * *

In fear and trembling we pray:

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships so that we may live deeply within our hearts? May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation? May God bless us with tears to share for those who suffer in pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy? And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world so that we can do what others claim cannot be done. May the blessing of the God of Abraham and Sarah, and Jesus born in Bethlehem of our sister Mary, and of the Holy Spirit, who broods over the world as a mother over her children, be upon us and remain with us always. Amen.

(A Franciscan Benediction)

In love and compassion we say:

We refuse to be enemies. We refuse to have enemies

Dudu Masango, Moss Nthla, Edwin Arrison, Marthie Momberg, Nancy Heron, Johan van der Merwe, Clint Le Bruyns, Ntuthuko Nkosi, Roxanne Jordaan, Stiaan van der Merwe