

# Palestinian Christian groups in the U.S. call on faith communities to end Israel's Apartheid against the Palestinian people

April 21, 2018

*Then the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice. (Isaiah 59:15b)*

*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it. (Luke 19:41)*

We the undersigned, a group of Palestinian-American Christians from several church traditions, call on all faith communities to:

- Denounce the Trump administration's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the decision to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem.
- Lift up, in your places of worship, the plight of Palestinians, Muslims and Christians alike, recognizing that Israeli policies of occupation and apartheid are leading to the virtual extinction of the indigenous Christian population in Palestine.
- Recognize the urgency of ending Israel's genocidal siege and attacks on the entire Palestinian hostage population of the Gaza Strip.
- Continue to use economic pressure as well as other nonviolent means to compel Israel to end its apartheid practices and policies against the Palestinian people.

We express deep concern at the increasingly hostile direction of Israeli policies and actions, emboldened by the equally aggressive foreign policy stance of the Trump administration toward the Palestinian people. President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital is the final nail in the coffin of the so-called "peace process," which has now been unmasked as a farce, exposing the United States not as an "honest broker" but as Israel's unquestioning advocate. There is little doubt that the Trump administration's Jerusalem decision, although condemned by the overwhelming majority of the international community, will encourage Israel to act with even greater impunity.

The Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, as well as the rest of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Syrian Golan Heights, is now in its fifty-first year, the longest military occupation since the end of the nineteenth century. Palestinian Christians and Muslims are calling on the church to use its influence to end the occupation.

Since its occupation of Arab East Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has consistently followed a policy aimed at confining the city's Palestinian population to ghettos surrounded by a ring of expanding Jewish settlements. It annexed the city and its suburbs into a much-expanded "greater Jerusalem," and isolated it from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories. This separation of Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank has resulted in grave economic and social consequences for all Palestinians in the occupied territories, because East Jerusalem has been the economic and spiritual heart of the Palestinian territories. Even the U.S. State Department recognized in a [2009 report](#) that "many of [Israel's] policies in Jerusalem were designed to limit or diminish the non-Jewish population of Jerusalem." Palestinian Jerusalemites complain that conditions are far worse now.

Last year, a Palestinian mass protest forced Israeli authorities to retreat from a decision to impose obtrusive “security measures” in the form of metal detectors at the entrances to the Muslim holy sites of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Christians joined their Muslim brothers and sisters in peaceful protest, some praying shoulder-to-shoulder in the streets surrounding the mosques. More recently, it was the turn of the Christian communities to experience a serious attack on their freedom to worship, in the form of debilitating Israeli taxes on church properties. A [protest letter signed by the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem](#) strongly condemned this decision as a departure from the centuries-old tradition of tax exemptions for places of worship, under both Muslim and Christian rule. Church leaders closed the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for several days in protest, marking only the second time to close this sacred site.

Palestinian protests and international pressure have since compelled Israeli authorities to suspend the legislation in question. However, Palestinians are rightly concerned that Israel will continue to find ways to weaken Palestinians’ control of their land and property. Many are concerned about Jerusalem as the birthplace of Christianity: will it become a city with Christian shrines and cathedrals but devoid of the native Christian population?

On Friday, March 30th, Israel committed a massacre in the Gaza Strip, where Palestinians were engaged in a demonstration on Land Day. This annual event commemorates the killing, in 1976, of six unarmed Palestinians in the Galilee who were protesting against the confiscation of their lands. The Gaza demonstrators were protesting against the genocidal conditions that Israel has imposed on the territory of two million inhabitants over the past eleven years; most importantly, they were expressing their right of return to their lands and villages from which the Israeli forces expelled them in 1948. The peaceful protest was interrupted by the Israeli army, which used tanks and militarized drones as well as over 100 well-hidden snipers. Violence began by the Israeli forces who shot a farmer working on his land. This served as incitement to a few protestors—out of a total of about 30,000 peaceful demonstrators, to engage in throwing stones from behind a large, barbed wire fence. The unarmed Palestinians’ actions did not come anywhere close to endangering the Israeli forces. Eighteen Palestinians were shot dead and hundreds of men, women, and children were wounded.

These events occurred on Good Friday, when the Christian world was mourning the crucifixion of Jesus. As the injustices and human rights violations keep piling up against the Palestinian people, we call on all churches and faith communities to take bold steps to end these grave injustices. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Faith is taking the first step up even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”

#### *Signatories*

- Palestinian Christian Advocates for Justice
- [Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace](#)

#### *Endorsers*

- American Muslims for Palestine
- Israel-Palestine Mission Network, Presbyterian Church USA
- Franciscan Action Network

- Friends of Sabeel, North America
- Mennonite Palestine-Israel Network
- Pax Christi Metro DC-Baltimore
- Pax Christi USA
- Palestine-Israel Network of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- Palestine-Israel Network of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship
- Palestine-Israel Network of the United Church of Christ
- United Methodist Kairos Response- Steering Committee
- Kairos USA