

Confronting Christian Zionism

Statement from *Justice in Palestine and Israel Community* Alliance of Baptists

In 2009 Palestinian Christians offered a cry of hope in the face of suffering by writing and publishing *Kairos Palestine – A Moment of Truth: A Word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*. Responding to that call, the Alliance of Baptists committed ourselves in previous statements to several actions in support of and joint struggle with the Palestinian people, including listening to and learning from Palestinian voices, studying Kairos Palestine, engaging in non-violent action through Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS), and supporting legislation that holds the United States accountable for its unchecked financial and political support of Israel.

In December 2019 Kairos Palestine celebrated its 10th anniversary. The Palestinian community and the International Christian community gathered in Bethlehem to assess the impact of this modern-day epistle, a letter grounded in Scripture that articulates a practical theology of liberation, insists on the necessity of naming and resisting evil and offers a clarion call to the world to engage in joint struggle with Palestinians and all oppressed communities. At this gathering, the community affirmed the relevance of this epistle and the need to continue to heed its wisdom. Further, the community expressed the urgency of challenging Christian Zionism, especially in the United States (U.S.) context.

U.S. Christian Zionists have been the driving force of the increased oppression of the Palestinian people in the past 10 years. Christians United For Israel (CUFI), the largest pro-Israel lobby group in the country, claims to have grown from 5 to 8 million members in 2019 alone. It was founded in 2006 by John Hagee. There are at least 200 Christian Zionist organizations known to have been founded since 1980.¹

Christian Zionism is “a political and theological ideology that uses Christian texts to support the modern nation-state of Israel out of the belief that Israel has a biblical purpose to bring about the ‘End Times’ ...” Christian Zionist theology holds that Israel must gather all the Jews of the world, enlarge its territory, destroy Muslim holy places, and ethnically cleanse ‘the holy land’ of all non-Jews” and, eventually, all non-Christians.² It is therefore inherently anti-Semitic and Islamophobic. Theologically, it argues that God is dependent upon modern day Israel’s expansion in order to usher in the “end times.”

Politically, Christian Zionism galvanizes Christian support to pressure the U.S. government –including every administration since Israel was founded in 1948 – to endorse Israel’s military occupation, racist policies, and increasing oppression of the Palestinian people, e.g., moving the embassy to Jerusalem, ending UN Relief and Works Agency³ funding, annexing the Golan Heights, and promoting anti-BDS legislation. With the support of high-ranking government officials in the previous Administration, like Vice-President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who spoke to the 2019 CUFI conference, it is clear to see how Christian Zionist ideology is heavily embedded in U.S. administrations and politics, wreaking havoc on foreign policy decisions.⁴ Unfortunately, the election of a new President has not significantly changed U.S. policies towards Israel. The Biden Administration, despite promising statements during the campaign, has

not changed the main tenets of US policy towards Israel and Palestine. For example, the Biden Administration only partially restored aid to the UNRWA. In 2017, the US provided \$365 million to the UN agency, but Biden is only restoring \$150 million. In addition, Biden announced in February that the US would keep its Embassy in Jerusalem, and not move it back to Tel Aviv. The Biden Administration also allowed a recent major weapons sale despite Israel's use of weapons on children, journalists and medics. Certainly, the Biden Administration is not blatantly supporting settlements or annexation, but since the main tenets of US policy have not changed, the impacts of Christian Zionism on US policy remain in place.

At the December 2019 Kairos Gathering, Palestinian leaders reiterated their appeal to the international community to **name evil** in the context of our faith, calling particular attention to any theology that justifies the privileging of any people over another. They further implored the global church to **challenge evil** from the logic of love, confronting the misuse and abuse of Scripture, particularly Christian Zionism, and insisting churches to be about the work of justice, liberation, and reconciliation. Finally, we were asked to **embody hope** in our joint struggles for liberation, recognizing the power of the people of God to stand together in our quest for global manifestations of the beloved community. These appeals were again shared in 2020, in light of impending "official" annexation, in the *Cry of Hope and Call to Decisive Action*, to which the Alliance of Baptists has committed itself.

In the 10th anniversary statement, Kairos Palestine called out: "So, like those who stand watch upon the tower, we repeat our call and cry out again for your solidarity, your earnest prayers and your commitment to *take action*. Stand up and speak out in your own setting to insist on a just peace."

In response to these calls from Kairos Palestine, we – the Alliance of Baptists – rise up and speak out.

In light of these renewed appeals, we – the Alliance of Baptists – denounce Christian Zionism as theologically corrupt and politically abusive.

Today, we – the Alliance of Baptists, our congregations and our individual members – commit to education on the dangers of Christian Zionism. We commit to challenge this theology, as a particularly pervasive manifestation of a death-dealing theology and instead we commit anew today to a theology of liberation, love and justice for all people. We commit to challenge U.S. public policy that is grounded in Christian Zionism and instead will promote U.S. public policy grounded in the true gospel of liberation that ends the occupation and builds a just society for both Israelis and Palestinians. ⁵

¹ <http://www.stephensizer.com/2019/11/kairos-palestine-evangelical-movement/>

² <https://www.fosna.org/countercufi>

³ The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is an UN agency created in December 1949 to support the relief and human development of Palestinian refugees.

⁴ For more information:

<https://washingtonmonthly.com/2020/01/07/pompeo-aligns-u-s-foreign-policy-with-the-christian-zionists/>

⁵ In adopting this statement, we join our ecumenical partners in the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the *Episcopal Church in America* and the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* in calling our members to study and learn about Christian Zionism and join our partners in the UCC and PCUSA in denouncing Christian Zionism as theologically corrupt and politically abusive.

For further study:

- Link to recording of the panel discussion entitled “Christians Against Christian Zionism”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAI_p8Z_GGM
- FOSNA Toolkit on Christian Zionism: www.fosna.org/countercufi
- ELCA brochure on Christian Zionism:
www.fosna.org/sites/default/files/PNW_Issues_Christian_Zionism.pdf
- Article from Global Ministries of the UCC and DoC:
www.globalministries.org/mee_resources_christian_zionism_koshy
- Article from Baptist News Global:
www.baptistnews.com/article/trumps-middle-east-peace-plan-makes-sense-until-you-read-it-christian-peace-activist-says/#.XIVvTJVKjIU
- Website on Christian Zionism: www.christianzionism.org
- Two other presentations on Christian Zionism:
<http://www.stephensizer.com/2019/11/kairos-palestine-evangelical-movement/>;
<http://stephensizer.com/2019/12/christian-zionism-seven-biblical-answers/>

Groups Endorsing the Statement:

- Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice Coalition (<https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php> & <https://www.facebook.com/globalkairosforjusticecoalition/>) – Rifat Kassis, General Counsel
- Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA <https://www.fosna.org>) – Jonathan Kuttub, Executive Director
- Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org>) – Stephanie Fox, Executive Director
- PCAP – Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace (www.pcap-us.org)