

**Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about the
[DECLARATION FOR A JUST PEACE BETWEEN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL](#):
A Resolution of Witness offered for approval by General Synod 33
Of the United Church of Christ**

Many of the questions below, along with more in-depth background and information for congregations, are addressed in greater detail in "[Endorse and Affirm](#)," a video resource you are invited to download and use in your own church.

Why is this Declaration important now? The UCC has spoken on Palestine and Israel previously, including at previous General Synods; what is new in this statement?

This Declaration seeks to speak to our church about Palestinian suffering in theological language and with political awareness. Two major documents produced in the past decade by our partners in Palestinian churches call upon Christians everywhere to support a peaceful struggle for justice for Palestinians: Kairos Palestine, "[A Moment of Truth: A word of faith and hope from the heart of Palestinian suffering](#)" (2009); and Kairos Palestine, "[Cry for Hope: A Call to Decisive Action](#)" (2020). The 2020 call appeals anew for "decisive action on a matter that we believe relates to the integrity of our Christian faith." The document names the occupation of Palestine as sin; it describes the occupation as an apartheid system. The proposed Declaration joins in these understandings. To do so is both a theological statement (calling the occupation a sin) and a political reality (the Israeli occupation meets international standards that define an apartheid system).

Again joining our Palestinian partners, the Declaration notes recent developments in United States policy, e.g.: moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; cancelling longstanding policy of opposition to illegal Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank, among others; as well as noting recent political realities in Israel, such as passage of the Israeli Nation State Law which grants full rights of Israeli citizenship only to Jews. The Declaration names Christian Zionism as incompatible with the Gospel, reaffirms the rights of Palestinian refugees, and refuses to allow legitimate activism in support of Palestinian human rights to be defined on college campuses as anti-Semitic hate speech.

At this critical moment the Declaration's objective is to widen recognition of how the situation has deteriorated for Palestinians over the past four years, and build commitment to doing the work of bringing a new era of positive change into being with new American leadership.

What is the UCC's history with Palestine and Palestinians? What are our relationships with Palestinian Christians and their churches and institutions?

The UCC has more than 200 years of engagement in the Middle East through its historical mission agencies, starting in the early 19th century. The United Church of Christ has been directly involved in ecumenical support for Palestinian rights, especially Palestinian refugees, dating back to the mid-1960s. The first resolution of the UCC's General Synod was adopted within weeks of the 1967 war, supporting a "permanent peace in the Middle East" and the "just treatment for the Arab refugees and relief of their suffering." Since its establishment 25 years ago, Global Ministries, the common mission agency of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), has been responsible for nurturing global mission partnerships for the UCC. Those partners include a wide range of churches and organizations in Palestine/Israel and the Middle East, among them church denominations, ecumenical councils and agencies, human rights advocacy organizations, and others. [A description of these can be found here.](#) The UCC, with the Disciples, has also appointed mission personnel to serve with these partners over the years.

How does the Declaration comport with the biblical history of the Jewish people and their relationship to the land that is now Israel?

The Bible records and interprets human experiences with the divine, and how those experiences shaped an understanding of who God is and what God expects of, and desires for, God's people. It is not a scientific document or an impartial record of history. Many theologians understand God's covenant with the ancient people of Israel as one of *righteousness*: the people committed themselves to obey God's moral and ethical commandments, and God promised to be with them and care for them as they sought to live out that commitment. Some Old Testament texts specifically refer to God's gift of a land to God's people; others do not; still others call into question the concept of God's people as a nation with a land. The contemporary concept of nation-state as we know it today was absent from the worldview of Biblical times. Modern believers look at the behavior of states through the lens of their faith and what it requires of them, and may be moved to call states to account for behavior that is perceived as unethical and sinful. Among many other sources and scholars, our distinguished UCC Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann offers a succinct, readable treatment of this issue in his book [Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict](#). This new "[Reflection Guide for Proposed GS Resolution on Palestine and Israel](#)," a resource prepared especially for congregational study of this Declaration, may be downloaded [here](#). Another Bible study resource for use by congregations may be downloaded [here](#).

Is this Declaration taking a political stance, and is that appropriate for a church body?

The United Church of Christ (along with many other denominations and religious bodies) has a long history of addressing national and international affairs as a part of its witness for justice for all peoples, and has called out many violations of human rights both in the U.S. and abroad. The Declaration continues the UCC's commitment to supporting non-violent means for movement toward a just peace that can be embraced by both Israelis and Palestinians. It is a recognition that the occupation, the expansion of colonial settlements, the devastating blockade imposed on Gaza, and the violation of human rights and international law represent violent oppression of the Palestinian people in their own land. International law permits violent resistance to unjust occupation, but this Declaration offers a vision of just peacemaking that provides a meaningful alternative to violent resistance.

Jesus taught and practiced liberation for the oppressed as an essential element of faith. Consequently, a witness for just treatment for oppressed people is a Gospel mandate. The Declaration acknowledges that implementing such a faith commitment may compel difficult choices in the political and social realm, and recognizes that changes in the interest of justice for Palestinians will have political implications for the State of Israel and its people, as well as for U.S. policy.

What does the Declaration say or imply about our church's relationships with Jews and Jewish partners in interfaith endeavors? Can we continue to work cooperatively with American Jews and their organizations if we approve this Declaration?

Jewish opinion regarding Israel is not monolithic. Historically, many major Jewish figures have criticized Zionism and Israel, including [Rabbi Elmer Berger](#); [Hannah Arendt](#), [Albert Einstein](#); [Yehudi Menuhin](#); Martin Buber, Judah Magnus, Brant Rosen. Likewise, American Jews today have varying attitudes toward Israel, and toward criticism of the Jewish State. Furthermore, Jewish colleagues hold many concerns for social justice and public welfare in common with those of other faiths. Our responsibility as Christians is to be as open as possible to cooperation wherever we see that interfaith work can effectively address common problems and issues. The Declaration in no way prejudices cooperation with Jews or Jewish groups in tackling problems that are shared by people of many faiths. In fact, such cooperation may open opportunities for greater understanding and communication about matters that cause us disagreement.

Is this Declaration anti-Semitic? Many countries experience terrible human rights violations - aren't we picking on Israel unfairly?

The American organization, [Jewish Voice for Peace](#), states: "Criticism of Jews for being Jews is anti-Semitic; criticism of the state of Israel is not." Given that Christianity bears a long history of anti-Semitic belief and behavior toward Jews - which the Declaration condemns -- it is important to be very clear about that distinction.

Witness to injustice against Palestinians is a critique of unjust policies and human rights violations practiced by the State of Israel, not of Israelis or Jews. [Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa](#) has been passionate in his comparison of former South African apartheid with the occupation of Palestine, and his support for the nonviolent Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. Former Israeli Knesset (parliament) member and government minister [Shulamit Aloni](#), warned publicly in 2003 that if Israel's treatment of Palestinians is "not yet genocide," it is certainly murderous and criminal.

[B'tselem](#), a leading Israeli human rights organization founded and led mostly by Jews, has recently issued an extensive report defining Israeli policy toward Palestinians as apartheid, defending its definition with detailed research and description. A 2020 article in the American Jewish publication [Tikkun Olam](#) [critiques the conflation of Judaism with Zionism](#).

The Declaration affirms the right of people of all faiths and backgrounds to live in peace and safety, free of discrimination and danger, with equal protection of law, and to freely practice their faith and express their culture. The Declaration critiques the behavior and practices of the State of Israel for violating the human rights of the Palestinians whose historic territory it occupies. Israel as a modern nation-state is to be subject to the same scrutiny of its behavior with regard to human rights as any country in the world, and is to be expected to adhere to agreements of international law (e.g., the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Hague Convention, which define responsibilities of occupying powers) to which it is itself a party.

Perhaps most importantly for U.S. Christians, the Declaration calls out the United States for its strong support for the tools of the occupation (Israel receives more U.S. tax dollars *per capita* in military aid than any other country in the world), as well as national, state and local legislative efforts in the U.S. to criminalize as "hate speech" any public criticism of Israel. U.S. policy helps to keep the occupation in place; it is up to U.S. believers to prayerfully call that policy into question.