

IDENTIFYING AND OPPOSING APARTHEID IN THE HOLY LAND

(Submitted by the Divestment Task Force, the Commission on Religion & Race, the Board of Church & Society, Open Table of Christ UMC)

Whereas United Methodists strongly reject and condemn all forms of racism and religious prejudice including antisemitism and must reject as well any attempts to equate criticism of Israel with antisemitism, in that such empty charges of bigotry seek to protect Israel from responsibility for its policies and actions, discourage others from standing with a suffering and oppressed people, and dangerously weaken the vital work of identifying and opposing real antisemitism in our society, and

Whereas race in international law is defined not as a biological concept, but as a social concept, applying “race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin,”¹ and

Whereas apartheid is a term denoting “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them,”² and

Whereas apartheid is named as a “crime against humanity” under international law and the primary features of apartheid include:

- Codifying into law a preferred group of people and giving that group preferential access to resources, benefits and services;
- Segregating the population into geographic areas based on identity; and
- Establishing laws and policies designed to suppress opposition to the regime and enforcing domination through arbitrary imprisonment, torture, cruel and inhumane treatment, and other violations of human rights; and

Whereas apartheid is not defined by the conditions that existed in South Africa, but by the United Nations Convention on Apartheid of 1973 and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1993,³ and the form it takes can vary from country to country: in South Africa the apartheid system was based on skin color and racial identity; in Israel/Palestine it is based on religious and ethnic identity (Jews vs. non-Jews), and

Whereas in most of the region between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, Israel is the sole governing power, and, in the remainder, Israel maintains primary control over Palestinians’ lives, and

Whereas Israeli authorities have demonstrated a clear intent to maintain domination over Palestinians to Jewish Israelis and enforce cruel, systematic oppression of Palestinians, which is the essence of an apartheid system, leaving the Palestinians fragmented geographically and politically, in a constant state of fear and insecurity, and often impoverished,⁴ and

Whereas within Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories the Israeli government has established its control over the lives of Palestinians with discriminatory laws and policies specifying in part where they can live, whom they can marry, where and when they can travel short distances, which roads they can drive on, how much water they can use, when they can

access their own farms, what land they can purchase, which justice system they are subject to, whether they will receive due process, and what kinds of punishment they will receive, and

Whereas Israel has seized the vast majority of the land and natural resources of the Palestinians⁴ and continues their dispossession today, and Palestinians in the occupied territories have lived under Israeli military law for generations without any protected civil rights, and six Palestinian human rights and civil society groups have recently been labeled terrorist organizations in an effort to inhibit Palestinian resistance to oppression, and

Whereas Israel has blatantly codified a racist governing principle in the Nation State Basic Law of 2018, which grants self-determination exclusively to the Jewish citizens of Israel; Jewish supremacy was thereby made a binding constitutional principle and all state institutions must now promote Jewish supremacy (B'Tselem's report, page 7),³ and

Whereas citizenship for Jews is given as a birthright, while citizenship for Palestinians living inside Israel is granted as an act of benevolence, not a birthright, and as such can be withdrawn at any time,⁵ and Palestinians living in the occupied territories are denied citizenship, and

Whereas many authoritative scholars and organizations have conducted in-depth investigations and issued reports identifying Israeli apartheid (some reports covering only the occupied Palestinian territories and others covering Israel as well), including:

- In 2009, a thoroughly documented, 302-page report on the occupied Palestinian territories by an international group of legal scholars, commissioned by the South African government;
- In 2017, the 74-page report commissioned by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA): "Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid" by Richard Falk (LLB, SJD) and Virginia Tilley (MA, PhD, MA);
- In 2020, a 58-page report published by Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organization: "The Occupation of the West Bank and the Crime of Apartheid;"
- In January 2021, a strong indictment of the Israeli government from B'Tselem, Israel's most eminent human rights center: "A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This Is Apartheid;"
- In April 2021, another extensively documented report from Human Rights Watch: "A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution;" and
- In February 2022, the powerful and comprehensive report from Amnesty International, the global leader in human rights advocacy: "Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians;"³ and

Whereas the foregoing legal scholars and human rights organizations have all come to the same humanity known as apartheid, and

Whereas, if apartheid is to be opposed and abolished, it is essential for the international community to recognize and name apartheid where it exists, and

Whereas Kairos Palestine, the Palestinian Christian movement endorsed by all the major Christian denominations in Palestine, in their "Cry for Hope" of 2020 has called upon the Church around the world to nonviolently oppose both "apartheid and occupation" in the Holy Land and to "uphold a vision of inclusivity and equality for all peoples of the land,"⁶ and

Whereas the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that United Methodists “commend and encourage the self-awareness of all racial and ethnic groups and oppressed people that leads them to demand their just and equal rights as members of society,” and furthermore “call the Church to challenge any hierarchy of cultures or identities,”⁷ and

Whereas The United Methodist Church has forcefully declared its opposition to the crime of apartheid, calling it a “heresy” and “a sin” that must be “condemned unequivocally – within Southern Africa and neighboring countries and throughout the world,”⁸

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the New England Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church recognizes that the Israeli government has established a system of apartheid, affirms that apartheid is antithetical to the Gospel message, and opposes this injustice and oppression in whatever form it presents itself, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Conference calls on the U.S. government to condition U.S. funding to Israel upon Israel’s willingness to dismantle its apartheid system and implement all the rights due to Palestinians under international law, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Conference urges all United Methodist clergy and laity: a) to listen to the voices of Palestinians regarding their situation, by meeting with them in their homeland, by seeking opportunities to hear from them in person or at online events, and through the study of the Palestinian Christians’ landmark 2020 document entitled “Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action;” and b) to join with and support all persons of good will who are seeking justice for all people in the Holy Land.

-
1. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (adopted 1965; entered into force 1969) is the principal international human rights instrument defining and prohibiting racial discrimination. In the process it defined race itself in Article 1.
 2. The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (adopted 1973; entered into force 1976). Article II.
 3. The international conventions and all the reports mentioned are available at the UMKR website: https://www.kairosresponse.org/it_is_apartheid.html
 4. Israel’s Apartheid against Palestinians, Amnesty International Report, Page 15
 5. Lana Tatour, “Citizenship as Dominations: Settler Colonialism and the Making of Palestinian Citizenship in Israel,” Arab Studies Journal XXVII No. 2 (2019)
 6. Kairos Palestine Statement – “Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action” <http://www.cryforhope.org>
 7. The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016, Social Principles: the Social Community (4th paragraph); the 1 Nurturing Community (2nd paragraph): <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-social-community> <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-nurturing-community>
 8. “Southern Africa,” Book of Resolutions, adopted 1988; “Web of Apartheid. South Africa and the destabilization of its neighbors,” Book of Resolutions, adopted 1992