

Committee on Exercise of Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

4 September 2018 meeting

Statement delivered by David Wildman, Co-Chair, Israel Palestine NGO Working Group

Your Excellencies,

My name is David Wildman with Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. As co-chair of the Israel Palestine NGO Working Group I want to thank the Committee for its work and for the opportunity to share some of the work of our members in 2018. IPWG is a group of some 20 NGOs, most of whom represent various churches, that work to uphold the UN resolutions on Israel/Palestine.

Many of our NGOs have worked with the UN since its founding. Methodists and other churches were among the NGOs present at the founding UN Charter convention in San Francisco in June 1945 and have been active ever since on issues of peace, development and human rights. Churches recognize the great importance of Human Rights and International Law both to protect and promote the well-being of all, and as the foundation for just and lasting peace.

Also, many of our member churches have been involved since 1948 with the Question of Palestine—especially the vulnerability and dispossession of Palestinian refugees. Churches have worked both in humanitarian assistance on the ground and in Human Rights advocacy.

Today, I want to share with the Committee some of the recent actions that churches in the US have taken on behalf of Palestinian rights in five areas.

1. **Ecumenical Events.** Each spring we hold Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, DC that brings together 800+ Christians from across the US to engage in workshops and lobby with their senators and representatives. There is always a Middle East track that includes workshops and advocacy on Palestinian rights. In June, Churches for Middle East Peace held a summit meeting where all the speakers were women to lift up the importance of women's rights and women's leadership in the struggle for Palestinian rights and just and lasting peace for all in Israel & Palestine. In October there are two more upcoming events: an ecumenical conference on Shared Jerusalem to be held in Houston, and a "Christ at the Checkpoint" conference to be held in Oklahoma City where churches will challenge the harmful theology and politics of Christian Zionism. There will also be an advocacy gathering of alumni of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine Israel (EAPPI) that will convene former ecumenical companions who each served for three months monitoring checkpoints across the West Bank and East Jerusalem.
2. **Legislative Actions.** Churches through the Faith Forum issue monthly action alerts on various legislative issues. We also make monthly congressional visits on the same action

alerts. We hold congressional briefings on urgent topics. For instance, in June we worked with Defense for Children International-Palestine to hold a congressional briefing on the rights of Palestinian children held in detention and subjected to military court proceedings. Churches also have organized several joint sign-on letters from heads of communions addressed to members of the US Congress, the US State Department and the US President. Three issues that churches have raised several times in the past year are: 1) the rights and protection of Palestinian children; 2) restoring full US funding to UNRWA as an urgent humanitarian need; and 3) opposition to anti-boycott legislation both at national level and in various states around the US. These anti-boycott acts seek to repress freedom of speech and criminalize acts of conscience in blatant efforts to intimidate and punish any actions that would criticize Israeli government human rights violations. In our recent ecumenical letters, churches have spoken out against the imminent threat of demolitions in the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar; called for an end to military sales to Israel and others in the Middle East; urged the restoration of UNRWA funding; urged the lifting of the blockade against Gaza; criticized the US move of its embassy to Jerusalem and called for Jerusalem to be upheld as a shared city for three faiths and as capital for two states; and marked 70 years of the Nakba and the long denial of the rights of Palestinian refugees including the right of return.

3. **Delegations to the region.** Many denominations have organized delegations to the Holy Land to meet with people directly and to cooperate closely with Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations. We have also had ecumenical delegations to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis that severely impacts Palestinian communities living under the weight of Israeli military occupation.
4. **Corporate Accountability.** Church agencies and pension funds are also investors and as such we have engaged with a variety of companies operating in the illegal settlements and profiting from business that sustains military occupation. We've filed shareholder resolutions, written investor letters and held company dialogues with companies such as Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, HP and many more. All this work in corporate accountability is to end company complicity in longstanding human rights violations and violations of international law. In this work towards corporate accountability, we greatly appreciate the work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and his office in researching and creating a database of companies involved in sustaining settlements and the occupation. We see this database as a critical tool that investors can use to change company behavior and uphold human rights for all.
5. **Nonviolent actions of Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions.** A growing number of churches have joined boycott and divestment campaigns as acts of conscience. I will not take time to mention all the many ways that churches have taken up boycott and divestment, but I want to mention the most recent one. This past July when the Episcopal Church met for its General Convention in Texas, it adopted a resolution to

create a human rights investment screen that would exclude companies involved with illegal settlements, longstanding military occupation and other human rights violations.

It was 36 years ago this month that I first became involved in the struggle for Palestinian rights. It was September 1982 when defenseless Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila refugee camps were slaughtered over several days as the Israeli military looked on. Following that slaughter of unarmed refugees, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for a boycott and arms embargo against Israel.

Tragically, 36 years later these nonviolent actions of boycott and an arms embargo are still needed to protect and promote equal rights for all – including Palestinian refugees' right of return. More than ever, we need an international arms embargo that today would also include boycotting Israeli arms sales that have served to destabilize many other places around the globe.

Twenty-five years ago, this month marks the signing of the Oslo Peace process. In these 25 years of a peace process Israeli settlements on Palestinian land have expanded exponentially. Home demolitions and ongoing dispossession of Palestinians has also expanded greatly.

Now more than ever, we need the advocacy efforts of churches, human rights organizations and other NGOs to join with strong actions by the UN and its member states to protect and promote Palestinian rights. Palestinian rights are a necessary pre-condition for establishing just and lasting peace for all. Justice so long delayed is indeed justice denied, but it is not justice destroyed! Justice will prevail only through much stronger actions from all of us in the international community.

We as the Israel Palestine NGO Working Group look forward to strengthening our work together with the Committee in pursuit of justice, freedom and equal rights for all. Thank you.