



PALESTINE

FOURTEENTH ASSEMBLY, UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

RESOLUTION 15.35



15.35 The Assembly resolved to:

- a. receive the requests from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, the Kairos Palestine movement and the World Council of Churches to act in response to the plight of the people of Palestine;
- b. note the resolutions of the Assembly Standing Committee regarding Israel-Palestine in Standing Committee minute 11.33;
- c. establish an awareness-raising campaign throughout the Church on the plight of Palestinian Christians and the Palestinian people, including promotion of the boycott of goods from the illegal settlements in the West Bank as part of the campaign;
- d. request the Assembly Standing Committee:
 - i. in partnership with other parts of the Church, including the Relations with Other Faiths Working Group, and with other groups mentioned in Standing Committee minute 11.33.10 and with the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network, to arrange for the development of educational materials to resource the awareness raising campaign and to enable members and congregations to determine their response;
 - ii. to receive any other requests for action from the World Council of Churches or Palestinian Christians over the next three years and determine the response of the Church;
 - iii. to support another Australian church leaders visit to Palestine and Israel in the next three years, arranged either ecumenically and / or for Uniting Church leaders;
 - iv. to report to the 15th Assembly on actions taken and outcomes achieved; and e) convey these resolutions to the National Council of Churches in Australia with an invitation to respond.

RATIONALE

Palestine has been under Israeli military occupation since 1967. The prospects for a negotiated peace and a “two-state solution” are bleak. The Occupied Palestinian Territories, consisting of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, are controlled by Israel. Gaza is under a military blockade. Illegal Israeli settlements and other Israeli land confiscations have taken over nearly half of the West Bank. Palestinians have little hope for a better future.

Palestinian Christians now comprise less than 2% of the population of Palestine. In 1948 Christians comprised an estimated 20% of the population. Palestinian church leaders fear that the Christian presence in the Holy Land is under severe threat and their churches are becoming little more than museums.



In 2009 the thirteen Jerusalem Heads of Churches endorsed the call of the Kairos Palestine statement for the worldwide church to take peaceful action against the oppression and injustice suffered by Palestinians. The World Council of Churches has long supported non-violent action in support of Palestine – for example in 2007 the WCC resolved to:

“Invite member churches and faithful to give moral and practical support to non-violent acts of resistance to the confiscation of land, the destruction of Palestinian properties and the eviction of people from their homes and lands, as the central committee recommended in 2001.”

In 2014 an international church conference supported by the WCC was held in Bethlehem to mark the 5th anniversary of the Kairos Palestine document. It requested the worldwide church to undertake five actions in support of Palestine:

- Listening carefully to Palestinian Christian voices
- Continued theological exploration and critique
- Active participation in creative resistance
- Continued promotion of economic pressures
- An inclusive vision of just peace throughout the Middle East.

There are at least two theological principles which compel Christians to act in response to these requests:

- We are part of the one body of Christ; “if one member suffers, we all suffer together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26)
- We are disciples of Jesus, whose life and ministry fulfills the prophetic tradition of bringing good news to the poor and seeking freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18-21, Isaiah 61:1)

Churches are increasingly responding to the requests for action. The Methodist Church (UK) has called for an end to the trade from illegal Israeli settlements. The United Church of Canada has called on church members to boycott settlement goods in a well-resourced campaign titled “Unsettling Goods”. The Presbyterian Church USA has divested from three US corporations which benefit from the occupation of Palestine. The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society has issued a call to boycott settlement goods. The Uniting Church Assembly Standing Committee resolutions from July 2011 are reproduced below.

Through the National Council of Churches in Australia two formal visits of Australian Church Leaders have taken place to Palestine and Israel, in 2007 and 2012. 55 Uniting Church ministers participating in the national ministers conference in Jerusalem in September 2014 heard firsthand from Palestinian church leaders and saw firsthand some of the difficulties facing Palestinians under occupation.

The Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network was founded in Canberra in 2006. It has formal relationships with the ACT Council of Churches and with Act for Peace, the NCCA international aid agency. Over 600 people are part of the network, and it is co-convened by two Uniting Church members – Rev Gregor Henderson and Ms Ros Harper. PIEN is available to assist the Church in implementing the above proposals. PIEN’s vision statement includes:

“PIEN is a network of Australian Christians who seek lasting peace for the people of Palestine and Israel. We aim to equip and inform Australian churches, inspired by Christ’s vision for universal reconciliation.”

PIEN launched an Australian campaign for the boycott of settlement goods in May 2015.

Further information can be found on websites such as pien.org.au, www.kairospalestine.ps, and pief.ouk-oumene.org



We present this proposal in response to the requests for action from the Christians in Palestine and the WCC, in full agreement with the WCC Amman Call from June 2007 that “Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action”.

Assembly Standing Committee minute 11.33

11.33 It was resolved to:

11.33.01 receive the report;

11.33.02 in response to the resolutions of the National Council of Churches in Australia and the requests for action made by the Palestinian Christian community in the Kairos Palestine document, by the Jerusalem Heads of Churches and by the World Council of Churches, invite church members and congregations to consider taking actions with the purposes of:

- encouraging the governments of Israel and Palestine to move more seriously and effectively towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict between them, and
- encouraging the Australian Government to use its influence more seriously and effectively towards a resumption of peace talks between Israel and Palestine, towards an end of the occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and of the blockade of Gaza, and towards a two state solution with secure internationally-recognised borders, in accordance with United Nations resolutions;

11.33.03 reaffirm the Uniting Church’s commitment to the existence, in peace and security, of the State of Israel (Jews and Judaism, 2009 Assembly, point 15);

11.33.04 reaffirm the Uniting Church’s conviction that “anti-Semitism in all its expressions is an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Jews and Judaism, 2009 Assembly, point 8);

11.33.05 endorse the NCCA Executive resolutions of November 2010 Supporting a vision for the future beyond current realities for the Palestinian and Jewish peoples (NCCA 10.11.06);

11.33.06 on behalf of the Assembly, the national council of the Uniting Church in Australia, resolve to join the boycott of goods produced in the illegal Israeli settlements;

11.33.07 authorise Glenda Blakefield and Gregor Henderson to prepare a kit of resources to assist the church as it considers the Assembly’s invitation to consider taking action, in accordance with the outline of contents in this report to Standing Committee, and authorise the President and General Secretary to give final approval for release of the kit to the church;

11.33.08 request the President and General Secretary to meet as soon as possible with leaders of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry to convey to them in person the decisions of the Standing Committee and the reasons for the decisions;

11.33.09 express support for the 2012 visit of Australian Church Leaders to Palestine and Israel, noting that the Executive Council of Australian Jewry will be invited to contribute to the itinerary of the visit; and express support for the World Council of Churches program Ecumenical Accompaniers for Peace in Palestine-Israel;

11.33.10 request the General Secretary to inform as soon as possible the Working Group on Relations with Other Faiths, the National Uniting Church Jewish-Christian Dialogue, the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Jewish-Christian Task Group, and the UnitingJustice network of these resolutions; and



11.33.11 request the General Secretary to convey these resolutions in writing to the National Council of Churches in Australia, the World Council of Churches, the Jerusalem Heads of Churches, the Australian Government and Opposition, the Israeli Ambassador and Palestinian Representative, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, and Muslims Australia, as soon as possible after the meeting with the leaders of Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

At this time the issues of genuine religious encounter and creating a peaceful Australian society have never been so strongly posed for our nation and our churches. Christians who live in these challenging times are called to bear witness to their faith in various multifaith and multicultural contexts.

The Uniting Church has made various commitments to maintain relationships with other faith communities, including “To Live with a Neighbour Who is Different”, Assembly Theological Resource 2000, “Jews and Judaism: A Statement” 12th Assembly 2009 and “Friendship in the Presence of Difference: Christian Witness in Multifaith Australia”, 13th Assembly 2012.

Consultation with those from other faiths will be important in the development and distribution of educational resources for the campaign, as per Assembly Standing Committee minute (ASC 11.33.10)