

Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum

Proposed Strategic Plan of Actions 2009-2010

Our Calling

The gospel compels all Christians to work for justice, reconciliation and peace. This imperative is particularly relevant to the Palestine-Israel region today; the region in which God became incarnate in Jesus who lived and related with the people, particularly the marginalized and oppressed. He preached the reign of God, and he died and rose again in this same region. We express our deep lament that this very region is today overcome by protracted violence, conflict, aggression and oppression.

Since there is no partiality in Christ, all social, political, economic, military and other walls that divide or separate Palestinians and Israelis, Christians, Jews and Muslims, must be dismantled. The church in particular has a responsibility to intervene in this regard so that a sustainable and just peace will be possible for all. Such peace will be compatible with the values of the reign of God. It will treat all with equal dignity, address historic grievances and initiate relationships of mutual trust and understanding.

Background

Almost sixty years have passed since the Christian churches first spoke with one voice about peace in the region. For the last forty years the Christian churches have called for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In the very place where Jesus Christ walked upon the earth, walls now separate families; the children of God -- Christians, Muslims and Jews -- are imprisoned in a deepening cycle of violence, humiliation and despair. The Palestinian Christians from Gaza to Jerusalem and Nazareth, have called out to their brothers and sisters in Christ with this urgent plea: "Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action." (*Adapted from "The Amman Call"*)

At the World Council of Churches' (WCC) International Peace Conference "Churches together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East" held in Amman, Jordan, 18-20 June 2007 the representatives of Christian churches and church-related organizations from every corner of the earth, affirmed the decision of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and launched the "Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum" (PIEF) as an instrument to "catalyze and co-ordinate new and existing church advocacy for peace, aimed at ending the occupation in accordance with United Nations (UN) resolutions, and demonstrate its commitment to interreligious action for peace and justice that serves all the peoples of the region."

A core group was convened in September 2007 by the WCC, mandated to facilitate the development of the Forum and also ensure improved cooperation between all actors. The core group has been informed by the reports of the working groups of the Amman conference in determining the first strategic plan of the Forum.

Vision

A just peace in Israel-Palestine where Christians, Muslims and Jews, Israelis and Palestinians, live fully reconciled as neighbors.

Values

The PIEF is founded on the following three imperatives in working towards its vision:

1. The ethical and theological imperative for a 'Just Peace'
2. The ecumenical imperative for unity in action
3. The Gospel imperative for costly solidarity

Premises for Action

1. That UN resolutions are the basis for peace and the Geneva conventions are applicable to the rights and responsibilities of the affected people.
2. That Palestinians have the right of self-determination and the right of return.
3. That a two-state solution must be viable politically, geographically economically and socially.
4. That Jerusalem must be an open, accessible, inclusive and shared city for the two peoples and three religions.
5. That both Palestine and Israel have legitimate security needs.
6. That the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal, and constitute an obstacle to peace.
7. That the "Separation Barrier" constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories is a grave breach of international law and must be removed from the occupied territory.
8. That there is no military solution for this conflict. Violence in all its forms cannot be justified whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians.
9. That comprehensive regional peace is indivisible from a just peace in Israel and Palestine.
10. That the life and witness of local churches is at the center of worldwide church advocacy for a just peace.

The WCC Commitment

The WCC has emphasized that the situation in Israel and Palestine is too strong for a divided church to counter and there needs to be combined efforts and initiatives to be sure all the churches can stand united and be strong together to make a real change in the situation. The Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, General Secretary of the WCC has asserted, "Churches together in solidarity can make a change."

To do this, the WCC's Middle East work was refocused and restructured in order for PIEF to encompass Israel-Palestine related programs of the WCC addressing issues of Christian public witness. The Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) and the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel (www.worldweekforpeace.org) now come under the PIEF umbrella and other programmatic initiatives are expected to follow.

Who / What makes up PIEF?

- A proposed "General Forum" of all those working together towards a justice-based peace for Israel-Palestine
- WCC member churches, ecumenical partners & all interested others involved in advocacy for Israel-Palestine
- A WCC-appointed Core Group to guide the future functioning of the Forum
- Working groups as needed to achieve the aims and objectives of the work of the Forum

Staff structure

- Coordinator
- International advocacy officer (40% staff time)
- Communication officer (not yet provided for)
- Project assistants

Related staff:

- Executive Secretary, Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC)
- International Coordinator, EAPPI

Partners

- Middle East Council of Churches (MECC)
- NGOs in Palestine, Israel and the world working on the conflict and who share the same vision and values
- WCC member churches and general constituency
- Specialized ministries and ecumenical agencies

Interactivity with partners and other WCC projects

- Ecumenical Accompaniment Program for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)
- Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV)
- Human rights to enhance human dignity
- Regional relations
- Interreligious dialogue and relations
- UN Liaison Office of the WCC
- Advocates and activities within the wider ecumenical network

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. The end of the occupation in order to achieve a just political settlement in accordance with UN resolutions and international law so that all can exercise their full human rights.

- 1.1 End international government support for the occupation and violations of human rights and international law in Israel and Palestine.
- 1.2 End public support in Israel and internationally for the occupation and for violations of human rights and international law in Israel and Palestine.
- 1.3 End economic support to the occupation.
- 1.4 End theological and ecclesial justification for the occupation and for the violations of human rights and international law in Israel and Palestine.

2. A continued presence and witness of a viable local Palestinian Christian community in Palestine and Israel.

- 2.1 To call for increased resources and capacities for Churches and Palestinian Christian institutions and ministries.
- 2.2 To expose and address the causes of emigration.
- 2.3 To encourage member Churches to raise awareness with their congregants about Palestinian Christians in Palestine and Israel, and mobilize in solidarity and support.
- 2.4 To encourage responsible pilgrimage.
- 2.5 To ensure the freedom of movement, residency rights and access to holy sites for local communities.
- 2.6 To invite and encourage networking with Palestinian Christians outside Palestine and Israel to join in PIEF related advocacy initiatives.
- 2.7 To encourage churches to develop and maintain Christian properties in the Holy Land.

3. Reconciliation and healing among Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Muslims and Christians based on truth and justice, mutual recognition and understanding.

- 3.1 To develop and promote a common platform on theological and biblical issues that seek to end justification for the occupation.
- 3.2 To encourage ecumenical and interfaith cooperation for sustainable peace and reconciliation.
- 3.3 To support processes of reconciliation and healing.

STRATEGIC ACTION FOR 2009/2010

The Core Group acknowledges that specific action of the WCC, member churches and all related partners relating to the aims of the Forum must take both a 'top-down' and 'grassroots' approaches at local, national, regional and international levels.

In order to end the occupation of Palestinian territories, the PIEF core group suggests actions in the following areas:

- 1) Actions challenging government support for the occupation,
- 2) Actions challenging public support for the occupation,
- 3) Challenging theological and biblical justifications for the occupation and
- 4) Maintaining viable the Palestinian Christian presence in the Holy Land.

The PIEF Core Group encourages the continued participation of the WCC, member churches and partners in processes of reconciliation and healing, specifically in interfaith contexts. In addition, it recognizes the inroads made in that regard at the Bern conference.

The overarching call to the WCC and other partners to dedicate the resources and capacity within program areas related to PIEF to ensure follow-through on actions relating to PIEF, most urgently in securing a communications officer

The Core Group calls on the WCC and all other ecumenical partners in advocacy to undertake the following focus on illegal Israeli settlement activity as a strategy for helping to end the occupation.

Actions challenging government support

Very few governments actually 'support' the occupation. Even though some governments oppose the settlements, very few governments have actually proven with *action* their opposition and therefore allow it to continue.

Therefore, the PIEF Core Group calls on the Forum to establish a 'collaborative church lobby' which targets: Church leadership, NGO leadership, the Quartet, the European Union, and individual nation states. Those partners already engaged in significant governmental lobby efforts include Churches for Middles East Peace (USA) and APRODEV (EU); their strengths could facilitate and encourage further global church action in this area.

Specifically, the Core Group *recommends*:

- That the WCC facilitate a meeting to establish a 'collaborative church lobby' by June 2009.
- That World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, 4-10 June 2009, focus on ending settlements as a theme for 2009.
- That the WCC and member churches develop a methodology of proactive advocacy for the end of settlements in all dealings with the State of Israel when encountered.

Actions challenging public support

The working group on ending public support for the occupation first acknowledges that there already exists a growing opposition against the occupation of the Palestinian Territories both inside the state of Israel and internationally. In facilitating an end to public support, the working group focused on public education, economic measures and acts of solidarity.

Specifically, the Core Group *recommends a strong public education approach with a focus on acts of solidarity and economic measures including:*

- That the churches be encouraged and assisted to participate in the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, week of prayer, education and advocacy.
- That churches establish artistic components (posters, postcards, art installation/model installation) to raise awareness regarding settlements. This fosters creativity to give visible impact engaging a wide public audience in every day life.
- That consumers are educated about the availability of fair trade Palestinian exports.
- That resources drawing on the theological reflection undertaken at the PIEF International Theological Conference at Bern (September 2008) are disseminated at the grassroots level for engaging in advocacy relating to issues of land and settlements (see the “Bern Perspective”).
- That churches and advocacy groups use resources and materials already in existence. The sharing of such resources should be facilitated by the PIEF communication strategy.
- That churches support and engage with the EAPPI by sending volunteers and making advocacy opportunities available for returned ecumenical companions.
- That churches identify and offer focus on a selection of companies who profit from settlements as well as ways to engage them to end support for settlements (shareholder engagement, boycotts, public education etc.).
- That consumers promote fair trade Palestinian exports as an entry point for public education around products exported by illegal settlements as well as maintaining a viable Palestinian economy.
- That churches and advocacy groups continue to build links with Jewish and Israeli organizations working to end the occupation.
- In economic measures, specifically relating to illegal settlement activity, the working group acknowledged the importance in identifying corporations which profit from
 - 1) construction of the settlements,
 - 2) development of infrastructure relating to settlements (by-pass roads and checkpoints, etc.),
 - 3) the security-military forces engaged to defend illegal settlements, and
 - 4) products and services exported from illegal Israeli settlements.

Actions challenging theological support

The “Bern Perspective” document from the PIEF International Theological Conference calls on the churches to “build trusting relationships that will allow for transformation which can come about only through continued dialogue and constructive confrontation in the spirit of Christian unity,” and to “continue in developing theological discourse about land, life on the land, and living together in the land...”

The working group *calls* on the WCC and its partners to:

- Continue the theological reflection in small groups which would focus on three issues:
 - 1) land,
 - 2) violence and
 - 3) the concept of God

Theological reflections should include the work of biblical scholars, theologians and ethicists from a global perspective with intentional inclusion of those peoples who share the experience of land struggles and violence, as well Palestinian Christian voices.

- Create a working group that will strategize on a process for capitalizing on the energy generated by the Bern conference and exploring the possibility of developing resources and materials for the churches.
- Develop ideas and/or guidelines for local or national events relating to the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel specifically relating to pastors and parish leadership to further theological reflection based on encounters with the realities on the ground in Palestine-Israel.

- Engage in reviewing theological education and curriculum of theological institutions which form leadership for ministry in order to challenge Christian Zionist and millennialism theologies or other theologies which support the occupation. One possibility would be to engage in a ‘theological survey.’

Maintaining a viable Palestinian Christian Presence

Specifically the Core Group *recommends*:

- Encouraging and supporting already existing initiatives which serve the aims and objectives of PIEF’s focus on maintaining a viable Palestinian Christian community by ensuring the communications strategy for PIEF links with the Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC) to identify them and make them visible to the churches and the world
- An endorsement by the WCC member churches and other specialized ministries and organizations of the “Code of Ethics for tourism in the Holy Land” established by the Palestinian Responsible Tourism Initiative.
- Calling for the active participation of the legal community and human rights advocates to provide resources and defense relating to forced migration and the preservation of property.
- Creation of an international campaign to raise funds for an Ecumenical Solidarity Fund, partnered with the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel (as part of the week events, a once-a-year collection be taken up for the Ecumenical Solidarity Fund in partnership with the focus on prayer that week).
- That the General Secretary of the WCC invites the churches to participate in the above-mentioned initiative for the fund as part of their involvement in the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel activities.