

STATEMENT ON WAR IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

*A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more.
(Jeremiah 31:15)*

We look to the Holy Land with a heavy heart, for all the death, destruction and trauma being inflicted on the people of the land. We listen to the cries of innocent children, women and men, who suffer so grievously and unjustly from this brutal violence. We lament with all who suffer – Israelis bereaved, held hostage or otherwise affected by the attacks on 7 October, the people of Gaza displaced from their homes, grieving for loved ones buried under the rubble of destroyed buildings, and enduring continuous intense bombardment.

We yearn for peace and for justice, for an end to the seemingly endless cycle of violence and suffering, and for its fundamental root causes to be addressed. We lament the abject failure of the international community and of political leaders in the region who did not persist in the search for a sustainable peace founded on justice and mutual respect for the equal human dignity and rights of all, and who kept the cycle of violence turning. As we stand on this precipice of morality and faith, we pray for peace, for justice, for wisdom, for understanding, and for restoration of our humanity.

The World Council of Churches joins in the international shock and outrage at the brutal attacks on Israeli communities by Hamas militants on 7 October 2023. We condemn the attacks on civilians, the killing of so many innocent children, women and men, as well as the taking of hostages and the use of civilians as human shields.

Examining the current situation in Gaza, under attack from Israeli armed forces, the WCC together with the churches of the region are outraged by and condemn Israel's disproportionate retaliation. We have seen the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, hospitals, churches and mosques by Israeli forces. The death toll has surpassed 11,000 - over two thirds of them children and women - and the number of injured 37,000. Attacks on churches and their institutions, including shelters for displaced civilians – especially children and women who have lost their homes due to Israeli airstrikes on residential areas since the war began – are totally unacceptable.

Additionally, in the West Bank – from where participants in WCC's Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) were evacuated in mid-October due to the war and the closure of the West Bank – we are witnessing unprecedented high levels of violence from the occupation, against Palestinian civilians, schools and communities by both settlers and Israeli armed forces, and closure of access to all Palestinian villages.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, on 8-14 November 2023, lifts up before our loving and merciful God the suffering and traumatized people in the land of Jesus Christ's birth. We highlight the lifelong and potentially inter-generational consequences of the terrible trauma that children in both Palestine and Israel are experiencing. We lament that the heads of churches in Jerusalem, due to the current circumstances of the war, concluded that they had to cancel the celebrations of Advent and Christmas. We pray for peace in the land, a sustainable and just peace founded at last on recognition and respect for the God-given human dignity and equal human rights of all people – Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Muslims and Christians alike – rather than a false 'peace' imposed by occupation and force of arms which cannot and should not be sustained.

The executive committee:

Appeals for respect by all parties for the God-given life and dignity of every human being.

Further appeals for respect for the principles of international humanitarian law, especially for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure – including hospitals (such as the al-Ahli, al-Shifa, and al-Quds hospitals), places of worship and holy sites (such as the St. Porphyrios Greek Orthodox Church), and UN premises – and calls for full and impartial legal accountability for all violations of these principles by whomsoever committed.

Demands the immediate unconditional release and safe return of all hostages.

Demands an immediate ceasefire and the opening of humanitarian corridors, and **calls** for guarantees of the unimpeded distribution and delivery of vital humanitarian assistance, including water, food, medical supplies and fuel, and the reinstatement of electricity and internet services in Gaza.

Urges the UN and relevant authorities to investigate all war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law committed from 7 October 2023 until the end of the war, where truth must prevail and accountability must be ensured so that such crimes may not happen again and again.

Implodes the UN Security Council to overcome the obstructive partisanship that is preventing it from fulfilling its responsibilities in relation to the current conflict in accordance with the principles of international law, including in relation to the need for a humanitarian ceasefire.

Refutes all those who seek to portray the current conflict in religious terms, misusing scripture to justify violence, killing, cruelty and oppression; we **reject and denounce** all such efforts to distract from the root causes of the conflict in the region.

Stresses its grave concern about the proliferation of hateful acts and expressions of antisemitism and of hatred of Arabs and Muslims in the region and the wider world, against the background of the current violence. In light of attacks on Jews all over the world who are falsely held responsible for the actions of the Israeli government we reiterate the executive committee's acknowledgement one year ago of "the legitimate fears of Jewish people around the world of the shortness of the trajectory from antisemitic attitudes and hate speech to genocide" and its reaffirmation of "the

categorical denunciation by the WCC's founding assembly in Amsterdam of antisemitism as sin against God and humanity."

Rejects any attempts to transfer Palestinians outside Gaza, permanently or temporarily.

Urges all members of the international community to re-engage in active and sustained support of efforts for a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, based upon an end to the illegal occupation and to the siege of Gaza, recognition of the equal human rights of all, and the applicable principles of international law. Without this, peace cannot be sustained and the recurrent cycle of violence is tragically likely to continue.

Reiterates the WCC 11th Assembly's categorical condemnation all such deadly and destructive violence whether perpetrated by Israeli forces or by Palestinian armed groups, which only perpetuates the cycle of violence, and **reaffirms** the Assembly's observation that the situation in the region cannot ultimately be resolved by violence but only by peaceful means in accordance with international law.

Expresses the worldwide ecumenical movement's profound solidarity with all the people of the region, in the midst of the current violent upheavals and uncertainty for the safety and security of their communities.

Invites all member churches and ecumenical partners, together with all people of good will, to pray for peace, and to actively support the ministries of the churches of the region and ecumenical and interfaith initiatives for justice, peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

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