

World Council of Churches (WCC) Policy on Palestine and Israel 1948-2016 (summary)

This document is a summary and synthesis of policy positions on key issues pertaining to the situation in Palestine and Israel adopted by governing bodies of the World Council of Churches (WCC) from 1948 to 2016. It addresses major themes in these policy positions, but does not pretend to full comprehensiveness. The document has no official standing itself; for the official authoritative positions, the original policy documents referred to should be consulted directly.

Achieving a just peace under the rule of law is the best and only path towards ensuring the well-being and security of both Palestinians and Israelis. This is the core of WCC policy concerning the conflict. It is a conviction that has grown as 50 years of illegal occupation of Palestinian territory has claimed lives, denied human dignity and rights, distorted the futures of both peoples, and deepened the conflict between them. In developing its policy on these matters, the WCC is especially attentive to those who are most vulnerable and suffering, recognises the relevant UN resolutions as describing the basis for achieving peace with justice, and affirms that the Geneva Conventions determine the occupying power's responsibilities in the meantime. Policy is set by the WCC Assembly (WA), Central Committee (CC) and Executive Committee (EC).

Key positions on Palestine and Israel, in brief, are as follows:

- **Palestinians have the right of self-determination;** their duly elected governmental authorities must be recognised; their refugees have the right of return and require a permanent solution. (EC 2006, WA 1998, CC 1990, WA 1983, EC 1974, CC 1969, WA 1968, CC 1967)
- **Israel and its legitimate security needs are recognised,** beginning with the state's emergence in 1948, to UN guarantees for its existence, in the right to protect its people under international law, and in guarantees for the territorial integrity of all nations in the area including Israel. (CC 2011, EC 2004, WA 1983, EC 1974, CC 1969, WA 1968, CC 1967, WA 1948)
- **Violence in all its forms is condemned,** whether perpetrated by the State of Israel inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories or by Palestinian armed groups inside the State of Israel. The conflict cannot be resolved through the use of force but only through peaceful means. WCC member churches are called to accompany and encourage the commitment to non-violence and active engagement in peace negotiations. (CC 2016, CC 2009, EC 2009, EC 2006, EC 2004, CC 2002, EC 1993, WA 1983)
- **Antisemitism is condemned.** WCC calls upon all churches to denounce antisemitism, no matter what its origin, as irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith. Antisemitism is a sin against God and humanity. Criticism of the policies of the Israeli government is not in itself anti-Jewish. (WA 1983, WA 1948, CC 1992)
- **WCC supports a two-state solution** where Israelis and Palestinians live side by side within secure, recognised borders and share Jerusalem, as per UN Security Council resolutions. (CC 2009, EC 2004, CC 2002, WA 1998, EC 1993, CC 1990, WA 1983, EC 1974, CC 1967)
- **Supporting the churches and indigenous Palestinian Christian presence and witness for peace in Palestine and Israel** is a central priority for WCC and the ecumenical movement. The Christian faith has its historical roots in this land, and is nourished by the unbroken witness of the local churches who have their own roots in apostolic times. WCC seeks to reinforce a positive engagement by churches in the life of the nations to which they belong. Loss of the Christian presence would endanger inter-communal conviviality and peace. The future of Christian communities is increasingly threatened by Israeli settlement policies and violations of the fundamental rights of Palestinians. Local

authorities must not interfere in internal church affairs. (CC 2016, CC 2011, EC 2006, CC 2002, WA 1998, CC 1990, WA 1983, WA 1975)

- **The *Kairos Palestine* document** is a call to the Palestinian Christian community to remain steadfast in their land, witnessing to God's love for all, while peacefully and creatively resisting the occupation. WCC member churches and the ecumenical movement are called to study and disseminate it, and listen and respond to the aspirations of Palestinian Christians expressed therein. (CC 2016, CC 2011)
- **The occupation of the OPT since 1967 is illegal and must be ended.** It is only through an end to the occupation and a just, comprehensive and lasting peace settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) can security of both Palestinians and Israelis be assured. Without an end to occupation, the cycle of violence continues. (CC 2016, CC 2006, EC 2004, CC 2002, EC 2001, WA 1983, WA 1968, CC 1967)
- **Settlements in the OPT are illegal, as is their expansion.** Such settlements are prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention, illegal, unjust, incompatible with peace, antithetical to the legitimate interests of the State of Israel, an obstacle to the two-state solution and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state – as affirmed by UN Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). Israeli settlers and soldiers must be withdrawn. A freeze on all settlement construction and expansion should be implemented, as a first step towards the dismantlement of all illegal settlements in the OPT. (CC 2011, CC 2009, CC 2002, EC 2001, WA 1983)
- **Construction of the Separation Barrier in occupied Palestinian territory is illegal.** It is a grave breach of international law and humanitarian law, and must be removed from occupied territory. (EC 2004, CC 2003)
- **Certain economic measures are legitimate forms of non-violent resistance to occupation and positive pressure for peace.** WCC supports an international boycott of goods and services from illegal Israeli settlements in the OPT. WCC considers targeted economic measures an important non-violent strategy for promoting peace and abating violence, and encourages member churches to avoid investments or other economic links to illegal activities on occupied territory. Member churches are encouraged to “thoughtfully and prayerfully consider how they might respond from the foundation of their faith” in their own contexts. (CC 2016, CC 2014, CC 2009, EC 2009, EC 2006, CC 2005, EC 2001, CC 2001)
- **Jerusalem must be an open, inclusive and shared city for two peoples and three religions.** The rights of its communities – Muslim, Jewish and Christian, Palestinian and Israeli – including access to Holy Places and freedom of worship, must be assured. WCC opposes the annexation of East Jerusalem and other unilateral actions altering the city's geography and demography. The final status of Jerusalem must be agreed within the framework of international law and as part of a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement. Illegal settlements in and around Jerusalem – and restriction of Jerusalem residency rights – threaten this vision, pre-empting and obstructing negotiations for a comprehensive peace agreement. (CC 2009, EC 2006, EC 2000, WA 1998, WA 1983, CC 1980, WA 1975, CC 1974)
- **The WCC supports groups on both sides working for peace** and reconciliation, including inter-religious initiatives. (EC 2009, EC 2006, CC 2005, EC 2004, CC 2002, EC 1993, WA 1983)
- **A just peace in Palestine and Israel is essential for peace in the world.** Unresolved, this conflict generates instability in the region and insecurity in other regions. (EC 2006, CC 2002, WA 1998, CC 1979, CC 1969, CC 1967)
- **Ecumenical accompaniment programme in Palestine and Israel** (CC 2016, EC 2009, CC 2005, EC 2004, CC 2003, CC 2002, EC 2001)
- **Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum** (CC 2016, CC 2009, EC 2009, CC 2008, CC 2006)