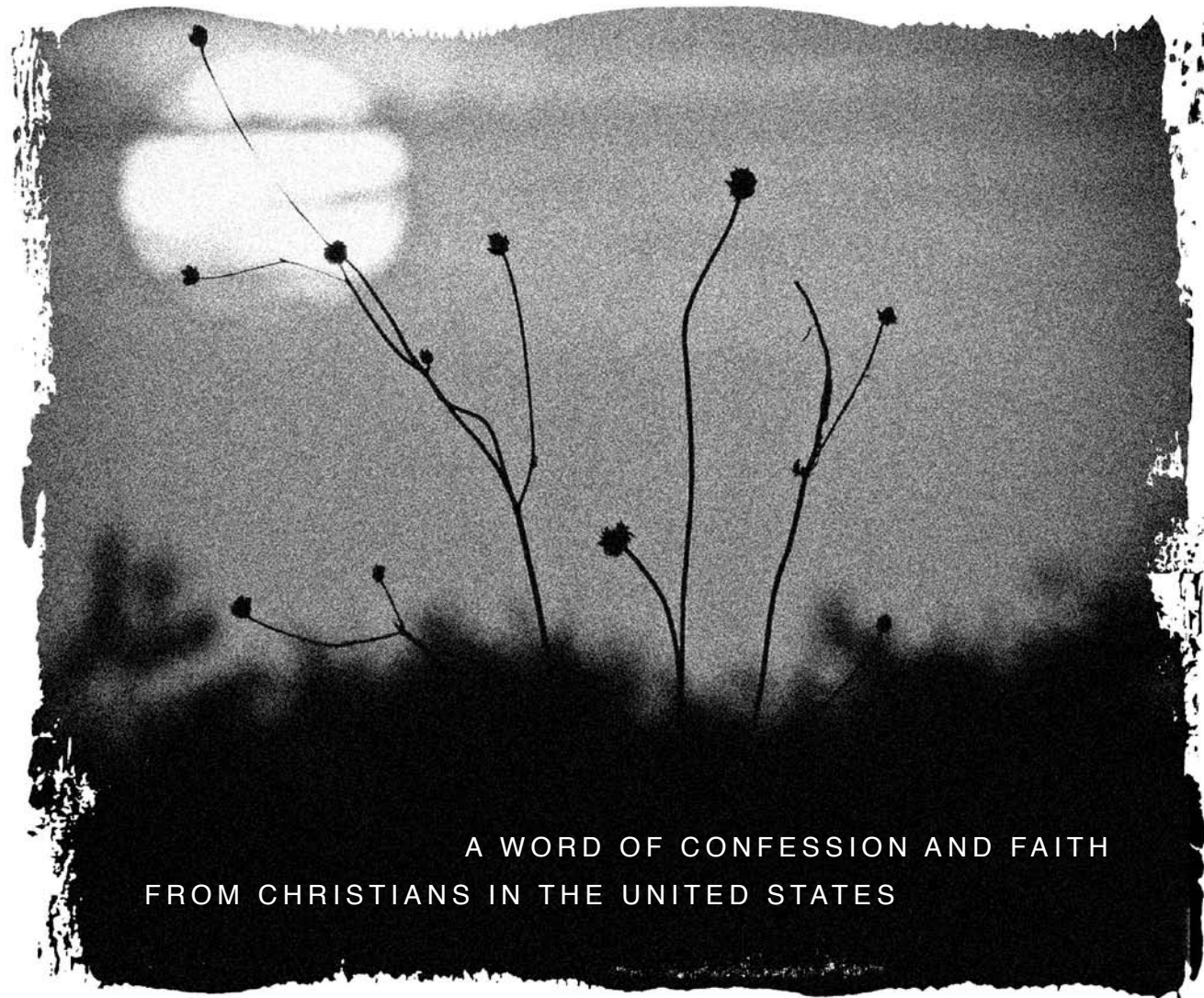


# Call to Action

## U.S. Response to the Kairos Palestine Document

**Hope** is the capacity to see God in the midst of **trouble**, and to be **co-workers** with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling **in us**.

"A Moment of Truth,"  
Kairos Palestine  
document, 2009



A WORD OF CONFESSION AND FAITH  
FROM CHRISTIANS IN THE UNITED STATES



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This is the KAIROS, the moment of **grace** and opportunity, the favorable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive **action**.

"The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church," South Africa, 1985



**Resistance** is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with **love** as its logic. Kairos Palestine Document, 2009

**T**he mission of Kairos USA is to mobilize the churches in the United States to respond faithfully and boldly to the situation in Israel and Palestine. In December 2009, the Christians of Palestine brought forth "A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering." In 2011 and again in 2012, U.S. clergy, theologians and laypersons gathered to write this response to the Palestinian document. In gratitude for the courageous witness and call to action issued by our Palestinian sisters and brothers and, inspired by the prophetic church movements of southern Africa, Central and South America, Asia and Europe that have responded to the call of our sisters and brothers in Palestine, we have prayed for the guidance of the Spirit so that we might also respond with integrity, love and wisdom.

We begin with a confession of sin to Palestinians in the State of Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, the diaspora and in refugee camps in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. As U.S. Christians we bear responsibility for failing to say "Enough!"

when our nation's ally, the State of Israel, violates international law. Our government has financed Israel's unjust policies and has shielded its government from criticism by the international community. At the outset of the current U.S. administration, our government led Palestinians to believe that at last we would pursue a political solution based on justice. But the "peace process" has continued to be no more than a means for the continuing colonization of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the imprisonment of Gaza and the intensification of the structures of oppression.

In humility and love, we add a word to our Jewish sisters and brothers in the State of Israel and around the world. As Christians addressing the Palestinian cause we must also acknowledge our shameful role in the historic persecution of the Jewish people. We recognize the dehumanizing and destructive power of doctrines and theologies that denigrated

Judaism. Our predecessors perpetuated anti-Semitic stereotypes, practiced scapegoating and cloaked prejudice, hostility and murder itself in the robes of our religion. We confess that our churches failed to resist, and sometimes even aided and abetted pogroms, mass dislocations of Jews, and the calamity of the Nazi Holocaust itself. In so doing, they betrayed the teaching and example of the one we claim to follow. We speak for and with our forbears in expressing deep remorse. With a commitment to never forget those failures and to be instructed by

The mission of Kairos USA is to **mobilize** the churches in the United States to **respond** faithfully and boldly to the situation in Israel and Palestine.



Photo Damon Lynch

# We must **work** and even **suffer** for peace, filled with a heart of **love** for both Israelis and Palestinians.

them, we pledge ourselves to growth in faithfulness, compassion and justice.

In light of these tragic failures, we must repent. We must work and even suffer for peace, filled with a heart of love for both Israelis and Palestinians. We know that raising questions about our churches' and our government's support for the State of Israel's policies

exposes us to the charge of anti-Semitism—and for many of us the risk of the loss of hard-won bonds of friendship with Jewish colleagues, friends and the Jewish community at large. We believe that the charge of anti-Semitism is unfair and in error. Too often, however, unwilling to pay this price, we have failed to speak the truth as we see it and in so doing follow Jesus' path of love

and forgiveness as the way to justice and peace. But now we are called to speak the truth, as our faith in the life and ministry of Jesus directs us. We firmly believe that it is precisely in this way that we express not only our commitment to the dignity and human rights of the Palestinians, but our dedication to the humanity of our Jewish sisters and brothers.

We acknowledge and affirm "the reality on the ground" described in the Kairos Palestine document. Many of us have seen with our eyes, heard with our ears and felt in our hearts the painful realities of life in the Palestinian territories. We have witnessed the daily, grinding humiliation of women and men, young and old; the deaths of civilians; the demolition of homes; the ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem; the destruction of

hundreds of thousands of olive trees; the unlawful and brutal practice of administrative detention; the relentless land taking and the construction of illegal colonies that have made a contiguous and viable Palestinian state impossible. None of these actions has brought the State of Israel the security it seeks. Israel is pursuing a course that is fruitless and corrupting, both morally and politically. We have also observed with deep sadness the damage inflicted on Israeli society, particularly its young people. We can no longer be silent; we can no longer betray the core of our Christian faith as expressed in Matthew 25: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."\*

**W**e call upon our Christian sisters and brothers in the United States to join with us in the following actions:

**Learn:** Move beyond stereotypes, longstanding prejudices and biased, oversimplified reporting, toward a well-considered, more complex understanding of the Middle East, its conflicts and the yearnings of its peoples for justice, peace and co-existence.

**Build personal relationships:** Visit the land and meet Palestinians, including Palestinian Christians, and Israelis working for justice and peace—listening to their stories, understanding their pain and hearing their hopes and dreams.

**Enrich worship and congregational life:** Take initiative in our places of worship to pray and preach justice and peace in Palestine and Israel, pursue opportunities to learn and study about the situation, explore cultural and economic exchange and challenge your congregation to participate in the blessed calling of peacemaking.

**Engage in theological reflection:** Examine flawed biblical interpretations and unexamined theology that have shaped attitudes and perceptions leading to and allowing the present injustice to continue unchallenged. Pursue open and active theological inquiry and encourage study and reflection, in order to guide your actions in striving to follow Jesus' injunction to "interpret the present time" (Luke 12:56).

**Participate in nonviolent action:** Translate concern into action. Support those—in Israel, the occupied territories and throughout the world—who work to end the illegal occupation through peaceful means. We urge Christians to become educated about the Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions and to explore this and other forms of legitimate, nonviolent resistance.

**Advocate with the U.S government,** as Christians who are committed to justice, peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians. Support political candidates who do the same.

The favorable time is now! We invite you to read and study this document; to see it as a spur to action. It is a call to individuals, churches, schools, human rights organizations and interfaith partners to join with all who embrace nonviolent resistance to injustice. It is a call to listen to the same Spirit that inspired the Civil Rights movement in this country and the struggle to end Apartheid in South Africa. We issue this call in the absolute conviction that God calls us to compassion—to join the struggle for justice and equality in the spirit of Matthew 25. We issue this call in the faith that, even when the cause appears most hopeless, God's light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

Photo Allison K. Schmitt



# Call to Action

## U.S. Response to the Kairos Palestine Document

A WORD OF CONFESSION AND FAITH  
FROM CHRISTIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

For the churches, too,  
this is a **kairos** moment  
in which we are called  
to **conversion**, our  
structures, values,  
habits and assumptions  
in need of basic  
**transformation.**

“On the Way: From Kairos to Jubilee,”  
U.S. Kairos document, 1994



Photo Damon Lynch

### P R E A M B L E

In June 2011, a group of U.S. clergy, theologians and laypersons, cognizant of our responsibility as Americans in the tragedy unfolding in Israel and Palestine, and mindful of the urgency of the situation, met to inaugurate a new movement for American Christians. We have been inspired by the prophetic church movements of southern Africa, Central and South America, Asia and Europe that have responded to the call of their Christian sisters and brothers in occupied Palestine. This is our statement of witness and confession—and our response as U.S. Christians to the Palestinian call.

It was in ancient Israel that the prophets called states and peoples to the core principles of God's rule: equal rights and justice for all, compassion for the most vulnerable and the unity of all humankind. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God as a present possibility and a demand to follow God's commandments to do justice. The tragic realities of Israel and Palestine today would deeply trouble Jesus and the prophets. The land in which Jesus lived and was crucified by the Roman imperial rulers is again a place of violence, inequality and suffering. Palestinians and Israelis are trapped in a spiral of violence that is destroying their humanity, squandering their resources and killing their children. Palestinians are prisoners in their own land, powerless as Israel's program of dispossession and annexation

continues. Israeli citizens, having endured five wars and intermittent attacks of violence during their brief history as a nation, continue to live with a deep sense of insecurity and a lamentable ignorance of the people with whom they share a love of this land.

The mission of Kairos USA is to mobilize the churches in the United States to respond faithfully and boldly to the situation in Israel and Palestine. In so doing, we heed the call of our Palestinian sisters and brothers in Christ to bear witness to their nonviolent struggle for human rights. We also express our love for our brothers and sisters in Israel, who suffer from the social, psychological and spiritual costs of militarization and war. In this way, we stand with Kairos movements throughout the world, lifting up the ideal of nonviolent resistance to injustice in accordance with the teachings of our faith. We call upon our government to be faithful to the principles of universal human rights, equality and justice articulated in its foundational documents, enshrined in international law and expressed in the resolutions of the United Nations.

We acknowledge the tragic history of Christian persecution of Jews. We lament the centuries-long experience of marginalization, oppression and physical threat, culminating in the near total destruction of European Jewry in the last century. We recognize that



it was this history of oppression that gave rise to the modern project of the Jewish people to establish a national homeland. We support the right of the Jewish people to live in security and to build a society free of the scourge of anti-Semitism. At the same time, we see clearly that the State of Israel's present course will not bring it the security it seeks nor grant the Jewish people freedom from fear. We know that some Palestinians have used violence and thereby have contributed to the suffering of Israelis. But the cause of the current calamity is not the result of any historic or natural enmity between the two peoples. Rather, it is the overwhelming imbalance of power, Israel's practices of state violence, the ongoing abridgement of the human rights of the Palestinian people and the failure of the international community to hold Israel to principles of international law.

We recognize our responsibility as followers of Jesus to honor and protect the image of God in every person. We recall the central role of the church in the Civil Rights movement in our country, when the courage of African-American pastors and laypersons changed the political and social landscape of America. We lift up the example of the South African church when, declaring its Kairos moment in the 1985 Kairos document "Challenge to the Church," it summoned the church to speak and

## The State of Israel's present course will not bring it the **security** it seeks nor grant the Jewish people **freedom from fear**.

act against the evil of Apartheid. This action of the South African churches signaled the beginning of the end of the system that had so poisoned their society. Two decades ago, the church in our country, recognizing its Kairos on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus, created "On the Way: From Kairos

to Jubilee." This groundbreaking statement called on the power of the Gospel to acknowledge historic and current injustices to our own indigenous and marginalized peoples as well as our responsibility for injustice and suffering on a global scale. Even as we respond to the invitation to Kairos from our Palestinian Christian sisters and brothers, we recognize the ways in which we have failed to respond faithfully to injustice in our own country, and we recommit ourselves to that work in our own context. In our own day, Kairos groups in Europe, Asia and South America have issued their own statements of faith and calls to action in response to the Palestinian document and in witness to the injustices in their own national contexts.

The focus of this Kairos initiative is on Israel and Palestine, reflecting the growing recognition of this longstanding and worsening human rights situation as an urgent challenge to our churches and our world



Photo Dennis Fox

today. At the same time, we are aware that this is only one of many issues facing us as we strive to follow the prophet Micah's injunction to "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God." It is our hope and prayer that the wisdom and courage we bring forth in answering the call for justice in Israel and Palestine will strengthen and deepen our awareness of other ways in which our nation's political, economic and ethical actions must be brought into harmony with Jesus' call for a world in which all share in God's peace.

In the tradition of Kairos statements past and present, this document will focus on three topics, with an additional section on Interfaith Relationships:

- Part One: The Signs of the Times**
- Part Two: Theological Reflections**
- Part Three: Interfaith Relationships**
- Part Four: Call to Action**

# The Signs of the Times

You know how  
to **interpret** the  
appearance of earth  
and sky, but why  
do you not know  
how to interpret the  
**present time?**

Luke 12:54-56



## Injustice in Palestine

**I**n December 2009, a group of Palestinian Christian clergy, scholars and human rights workers launched “A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering.” The document opens with a proclamation of the harsh reality of the present situation: “Today we have reached a dead end in the tragedy of the Palestinian people.” It goes on to present a bold challenge to the church and civil society:

The decision makers content themselves with managing the crisis rather than committing themselves to the serious task of finding a way to resolve it. The hearts of the faithful are filled with pain and with questioning: What is the international community doing? What are the political leaders in Palestine, in Israel and in the Arab world doing? What is the Church doing?” (Introduction)

As U.S. Christians, we cannot ignore this challenge. The time has come for truth telling—about the reality of the situation in Palestine and about the sobering facts of the U.S role in this continuing violation of fundamental principles of justice and international law. We can do no better than to present the Palestinian reality as recorded in the Kairos Palestine document:

“The separation wall erected on Palestinian territory ... has turned our towns and villages into prisons ... making them dispersed and divided cantons. Gaza ... continues to live in inhuman conditions, under permanent blockade and cut off from the other Palestinian territories.” (1.1.1)

“Israeli settlements ravage our land ... controlling our natural resources, including water and agricultural land.” (1.1.2)

“Reality is the daily humiliation to which we are subjected at the military checkpoints, as we make our way to jobs, schools or hospitals.” (1.1.3)

“Religious liberty is severely restricted; the freedom of access to the holy places is denied under the pretext of security. Jerusalem and its holy places are out of bounds for many Christians and Muslims from the West Bank and the Gaza strip.” (1.1.5)

“Refugees are also part of our reality. ... They have been waiting for their right of return, generation after generation. What will be their fate?” (1.1.6)

“Jerusalem continues to be emptied of its Palestinian citizens, Christians and Muslims. ... Their homes are demolished or expropriated. Jerusalem, city of reconciliation, has become a city of discrimination and exclusion, a source of struggle rather than peace.” (1.1.8)

“Emigration is another element in our reality. The absence of any vision or spark of hope for peace and freedom pushes young people, both Muslim and Christian, to emigrate. ... The shrinking number of Christians, particularly in Palestine, is one of the dangerous consequences, both of this conflict and of the local and international paralysis and failure to find a comprehensive solution to the problem.” (1.3)

The document’s challenge to the commonly-accepted rationale for this oppressive system is devastatingly compelling:

“In the face of this reality, Israel justifies its actions as self-defense, including occupation, collective punishment and all other forms of reprisals against the Palestinians. In our opinion, this vision is a



reversal of reality. Yes, there is Palestinian resistance to the occupation. However, if there were no occupation, there would be no resistance, no fear and no insecurity. This is our understanding of the situation. Therefore, we call on the Israelis to end the occupation. Then they will see a new world in which there is no fear, no threat but rather security, justice and peace.” (1.4)

Having witnessed the injustice described in the Palestinian document, we affirm the validity and accuracy of this analysis. We cannot turn away from the challenge that has been thrown down. Palestinian Christians are right. We also must read the signs of the times and embrace this Kairos moment. The time has come to make our confession and to commit ourselves to action.

### A church confession

**A**s the body of Christ in the United States, we confess that by not speaking truth to power we have failed to follow the call of Jesus to serve God with love and compassion for all people.

We have failed to challenge our government's policies. Rather than acting as an honest broker in negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, our government has consistently supported, both financially and diplomatically, the actions of Israel that have brought suffering to Palestinians, continuing insecurity to Israelis and the declining prospect of a just peace.

As individuals and as church institutions, we have supported a system of control, inequality and oppression through misreading of our Holy Scriptures, flawed theology and distortions of history. We have allowed to go unchallenged theological and political ideas that have made us complicit in the oppression of the Palestinian people. Instead of speaking and acting boldly, we have chosen to offer careful statements designed to avoid controversy and leave cherished relationships undisturbed.



Photo Ahmad Mesleh

We have forgotten the difference between a **theology** that supports the policies and structures of **oppression** and a theology that stands with the poor and the **dispossessed**.

We have accepted the narrative of a vulnerable State of Israel beset by powerful, implacable enemies, thereby excusing the state's actions that violate international law, isolate Israel in the community of nations and virtually eliminate the possibility of a sustainable peace.

We have forgotten the difference between a theology that supports the policies and institutional structures of oppression and a theology that, in response to history and human affairs, stands boldly with the widow, the orphan, the poor and the dispossessed. In our churches, political activities and personal interactions we have adopted the use of words that uphold rather than challenge injustice. We have accepted a notion of *justice* that is defined by the powerful and is equated with “security” and “law and order.” Declaring ourselves committed to *nonviolence*, we have condemned the resistance of the oppressed while legitimizing the use of overwhelming force by the powerful. We have called for *reconciliation* in the form of dialogue and mutual understanding while overseeing the continuation and

advancement of the oppressive conditions that breed continued conflict and violence.

We have acceded to the reality of a powerful political lobby and an array of advocacy organizations, Jewish and Christian, committed to silencing or suppressing conversation about and inquiry into the human rights practices of the State of Israel and to blocking legitimate direct action to bring pressure on Israel. We have invested in corporations that help carry out and profit from the occupation of Palestinian lands. In all of this, we have failed in our responsibility, not only toward the Palestinians, but also toward the Israelis, who suffer politically, economically and spiritually in their role as occupiers.

In confession of this failure, and as followers of Jesus, who in his own context of occupation called his people to renewed devotion to the fundamental principles of their faith, we turn to the beliefs and values that prompt our present course.



# Theological Reflections

## The reign of God

The context of Jesus' ministry was the Roman imperial rule over Palestine. It was an urgent situation for the Jews of that place and time. What was at stake was not only their economic survival and physical health, but the values that underlay their communal existence as set out in the Torah and reinforced by the prophets: care for the most needy and vulnerable, economic and social equality and compassion for all living things (Exodus 20, Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 5, Micah 6). Affirming that the rule and reign of God was at hand (Mark 1:15), Jesus declared God's renewed demands for justice, such as the cancellation of debts and mutual cooperation. In addition, he issued a radical new command—to love one's enemies—an actionable ethic capable of transforming the hearts of the other as well as directing one's own heart and actions toward justice and loving kindness (Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-31). He renewed God's demand that people not serve Mammon through the expropriation of others' resources

There was a time when the church...was not merely a **thermometer** that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a **thermostat** that transformed the mores of society.

Martin Luther King Jr.

and taking of land, and enjoined them to not trust in security maintained by violence (Matthew 26:52).

Jesus' proclamation of God's reign is radically life affirming. It is for this that we pray and to which we devote our work and this document. But misreadings of the Gospel have led to the horrors of the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the conquest of the Americas and the wars, genocides and ethnic cleansings of our modern age. In our own country's history, biblical texts have been used to support beliefs and actions that elevate one people or one race over another. The Bible has been used to justify and support the destruction of people of the First Nations, slavery, racial prejudice and institutionalized discrimination. In our day, misunderstandings or erroneous readings of the Scriptures have led to theologies that continue to support conquest and oppression.

We turn now to a consideration of two issues in theology that bear particular relevance to our response to this urgent situation for our faith, our churches and our nation.

## Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism is a movement in Christian theology that has enjoyed popular support in churches. Appearing in a number of forms, it has had an impact on Christian thinking and theology in modern history, even influencing the actions of governments, including our own. Traditional Christian Zionists maintain that the Jewish possession of the Holy Land presages the End Times. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was, in their view, the next step toward the fulfillment of God's plan as is foretold in the Bible. Indeed, belief in the Jewish people's special tie to the land can be found across the Christian theological spectrum. Many Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians today grant

**Biblical texts** have been used to support beliefs and actions that **elevate one people** or one race over another.

the Jewish people a special claim to the land linked to their election by God for a special role in history. The establishment of the State of Israel continues to take on a clearly biblical cast; the emergence of the Jews from the horror of the Nazi era into the miracle of the Jewish state evokes the triumphalism of the exodus and the conquest as depicted in the Old Testament narrative. In this view, Israel's military victories in 1967 and 1973 were further confirmation of a divine hand at work in history.

**W**e maintain that it is theologically, historically and politically incorrect to equate biblical Israel with the modern State of Israel. We reject Christian Zionism in all its forms because it supplants God's gracious presence in all the world with a territorial theology and with the promise of land to one particular people, a promise that leads inevitably to the oppression and even dispossession of other peoples. We reject the idea that God's ongoing covenantal faithfulness to the Jewish people (Romans 11:28-29) can be legitimately bound up with such claims. We believe that a role for the Jewish people will include their participation with all peoples in a new order of justice, equality and universal peace that Jesus calls the realm of God. In embracing this vision, we are not taking the land away from the Jews or in any way denying to the Jewish people their fundamental right to live in peace and security and to express themselves as a people and a culture. Nor are we challenging the reality of the Jewish people's special tie to the land in their own experience and in the view of many Jewish as well as Christian theologians. Rather, we believe, in the words of the Kairos Palestine document, that the land "has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land." (2.3)"

Christian Zionism supplants  
God's **gracious presence**  
with the promise of land to one  
particular people that leads  
inevitably to the **dispossession**  
of other peoples.



Photo Ahmad Mesleh

### Replacement theology

We are aware that in denying a theology of entitlement that gives the Jewish people exclusive rights to the Holy Land, we risk the charge of reviving the Christian doctrine known as replacement theology (sometimes known as supersessionism). In this view, the Church takes the place of Israel in God's purposes, denigrating Judaism itself and condemning the Jews to suffering for rejecting the Gospel. Christians have rightly wished to distance themselves from this destructive and divisive doctrine. We repudiate the anti-Semitic legacy of the church's past and the theology that undergirds it.

"Our core Christian belief is that God's promise in the Gospel is a promise to all nations. This means that

God's kingdom work in Christ is a promise to everyone regardless of race. We believe that the Church has found in Christ a fulfillment of all that God promised in Abraham, and that both Jews and Gentiles have been invited equally into this promise of a world renewed in love and compassion. The Church does not replace Israel. Jews continue to have a place in God's plan for the world. In Christ, all nations can be blessed (Genesis 18:18, 22:18; Galatians 3:8). In these times of growing international conflict and cultural mistrust, this is a significant promise. Theologies that privilege one nation with political entitlements to the exclusion of others miss a central tenet of the Gospel and inspire increased conflict.

### Theology and U.S. policy

How the meaning of land is expressed, understood and promulgated matters because it is clear that it affects U.S. policy toward Israel and the Palestinians in distressing and destructive ways. The notion of the "special relationship" between the United States and Israel, celebrated by U.S. presidents for decades, has crossed party lines and transcended political eras. Our government's policy toward Israel has at times reflected our own religiously-tinged identity as a privileged society blessed by God. The notion, for example, that the Jewish people have a special claim on Jerusalem and a superior right to the territory of historic Palestine over the other inhabitants of the land bears a resemblance to our historic American notion of "Manifest Destiny"—our nation as the "shining city on a hill." As Americans and as Christians, we must carefully examine how our own deeply-rooted sense of privilege may affect our commitment to justice and equality in this and other human rights causes across the globe.

### Our Kairos legacy

We stand on the shoulders of the leaders of earlier prophetic movements. These were times that evoked the spirit of the early church when, wrote Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr., "the church was very powerful ... not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society." We follow the lead of the African-American church, where the courage of the pastors and lay leaders who founded the Civil Rights movement soon spread throughout the churches of the land, changing the political and social landscape of our country. From his jail cell in Birmingham, Dr. King posed to his fellow clergymen a question that speaks directly to us today: "Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual church, the church within the church, as the true *ekklesia* and the hope of the world."

We follow the lead of our sisters and brothers of the South African churches who struggled for racial equality a generation ago. We are inspired by the courageous call of the 1985 South Africa Kairos document that challenged a "church theology" that employed words such as "peace," "reconciliation," "justice" and "nonviolence" not to end injustice and transform society, but to shore up a tyrannical regime. We acknowledge that in our churches we do the same when we sacrifice "peace with justice" for "peace and quiet," and when we ignore state violence while at the same time condemning the desperate uprising of an oppressed people. We confess that we are complicit with evil when, whether tacitly or actively, we support the continuation of structural violence in its many forms. We call to mind Jesus' teaching in Luke 12, where he asks, "Do you think I have come to bring peace? Not at all, but division!" Jesus was calling us to know the difference between right and wrong, between that peace which is the absence of conflict and that peace which is his realm on earth. In the tradition of Kairos movements that have come before us and in community with Kairos movements today in other lands and other contexts, we strive to know the difference.



# Interfaith Relationships

**T**he situation in Israel and Palestine is not a struggle among religions, as some would maintain, in which age-old enmities among Jews, Christians and Muslims fuel unending conflict and violence. It is, rather, about human rights and equality: about land, water and access to work, education and worship. At the same time, however, religious identity plays an important role in the ongoing conversation about Israel and Palestine in the United States, where “interfaith politics” has had a profound effect on political discourse and on the ability of the churches to take positive action.

## Christians, Jews and anti-Semitism

The relationship between Christians and Jews reaches back to the very beginnings of the Church. The earliest history of this relationship was marked by the struggle to resolve the conflicts between the Jewish followers of Jesus, Gentiles and the larger Jewish community (Acts 15:6-11, Romans 9:1-5). The apostle Paul promoted a vision of one community of humankind, free of the hostility and conflict generated by ethnic, class and gender divisions (Ephesians 2:14, Galatians 3:28). Tragically, however, until recent times Christian-Jewish relations have been marked by conflict, enmity and mistrust. When Christianity was established as the dominant religion in the late Roman Empire, thus becoming linked to imperial power, the Jewish community was forced into a position of isolation and defensiveness. Over the centuries, simmering mistrust and enmity between Christians and Jews was relieved by periods of relative openness, exchange and cooperation. Yet undeniably, the relationship has been characterized by systematic oppression of Jews throughout the history of the Christian West, punctuated by outbreaks of savage violence against Jews by Christians. This culminated in the attempted

extermination of the Jewish people in the heart of Europe in the mid-20th century.

Shocked and traumatized by the confrontation with the consequences of their anti-Jewish history, after World War II Christians began a determined process to atone for anti-Semitism and to reconcile with the Jewish people. The period from the mid-20th century to the present has been a time of steadily increasing interfaith exchange and trust-building between the two communities. Powerful impulses to honor the rights of the Jewish people for safety and security, as well as strong theological trends to support the standing of God’s covenant with the Jews, continue to this day. Many Christians see the return of Jewish sovereignty in historic Palestine as a corrective for 1,600 years of persecution of Jews by Christian empires and states. This has led to widespread support for the State of Israel among Christian clergy, academics, lay leaders and church establishments.

We believe strongly in the value of interfaith dialogue and reconciliation. But we acknowledge with sadness and distress that because of the powerful impulse on the part of Christians to atone for their sins against the Jewish people, vigilance against anti-Semitism today has come to trump working for justice in Palestine and Israel. The Christian need to rectify centuries of anti-Jewish doctrine and actions and to avoid even the perception of anti-Jewish feeling has served to silence criticism of Israel’s policies and any questioning of the consequences of U.S. government support for Israel. Differences between anti-Semitism and legitimate opposition to Israeli actions are avoided or explained away. Responsible discourse about Zionism is often denounced as hostility toward Israel and its citizens or branded as anti-Semitism. We believe that in our

The Christian need to **rectify** centuries of anti-Jewish doctrine and actions and to avoid even the perception of anti-Jewish feeling has served to **silence criticism** of Israel’s policies.

dialogue with our Jewish friends, family members and colleagues and in our relationships with the Jewish community on institutional levels, we must confront this pattern of avoiding, denying or suppressing discussion of issues that may cause conflict or discomfort. The fact that anti-Semitism still exists makes it all the more important to differentiate between actual anti-Jewish feelings and criticism of the actions of a nation state. Uncomfortable though it may be, we cannot be afraid to address the urgent issue of justice and human rights in Israel and Palestine with our Jewish sisters and brothers here in the United States. And, increasingly, these conversations must include Muslims.

## Relationships with Muslims: The danger of Islamophobia

Prejudice against Muslims and misconceptions about Islam are pervasive in U.S. society. Our government’s activities around the world reinforce fear-based discrimination against Muslims. In addition to the role that it plays in our foreign policy and its impact on American Muslims, Islamophobia influences our attitudes about Israel and Palestine. Islamophobia is pervasive not only in U.S. society but also in the Church.

**S**ome voices in America, many of them Christian, foment panic about rising levels of anti-Semitism in the Arab world and an impending holocaust against the Jews. They draw parallels between Nazi Germany and present-day (largely Arab) regimes and even world Islam, proclaiming them to be threats to Israel's existence and to our Western way of life. These destructive and divisive messages are tightly interwoven with the prevailing dominant American political narrative that portrays a democratic, Judeo-Christian West in a mortal struggle against a hostile culture of "radical Islam." Combined with the deeply felt needs of Christians to correct for historic sins against the Jews, these attitudes have a powerful effect on our ability to carry on productive conversations about Israel and Palestine.

We must take extreme care not to cast Muslims or Islam as the adversary—culturally, religiously or politically. At the same time we must recognize the extent to which the radicalization of Islamic identity has been fueled by the injustice against Palestinians, beginning in 1948 and intensifying in 1967 and thereafter. Indeed, the cause of justice in historic Palestine brings to the surface crucial issues about the long-term consequences of diplomatic and military policies that Western governments have implemented in the Middle East beginning early in the 20th century. As the church of Jesus Christ, we are called to overcome our imperial past and to remember, as Jesus instructs, to "do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31).

## A new future

In recent years, Jewish Israeli writers have challenged the "foundational myths of Zionism," which grant to the Jewish people an exclusive or preeminent right to the Holy Land. These writers do not question the right of Jews to create a vibrant Jewish culture in historic Palestine, or the deep historical and spiritual connection that Jews have to this land. Rather they invite the Jewish people to coexistence with other peoples—especially those with whom they now share the land. In our time, in the aftermath of the most horrific episode of anti-Jewish violence in history, the Jewish people have achieved an unprecedented degree of liberation from anti-Semitism. As Christians we recognize that anti-Semitism still exists and that we must continue to oppose anti-Jewish thought and actions. By the same token, if interfaith conversation is to become a part of the struggle for peace in the Holy Land, it must include an open discussion of the way our beliefs affect our perceptions of the political reality in Palestine and Israel today.

As we face the future, we ask our Jewish brothers and sisters to join us in building bridges that connect rather than walls that separate. We ask our Muslim sisters and brothers to join with us in the spirit of trust and community. And we reach out in love to Palestinian Christians. Together, we can overcome the fear of the other and, together, with all nations and all faiths, build a global society based on trust and compassion.

**Interfaith conversation ... must** include an open discussion of the way **our beliefs affect** our perceptions of the political reality in Palestine and Israel today.

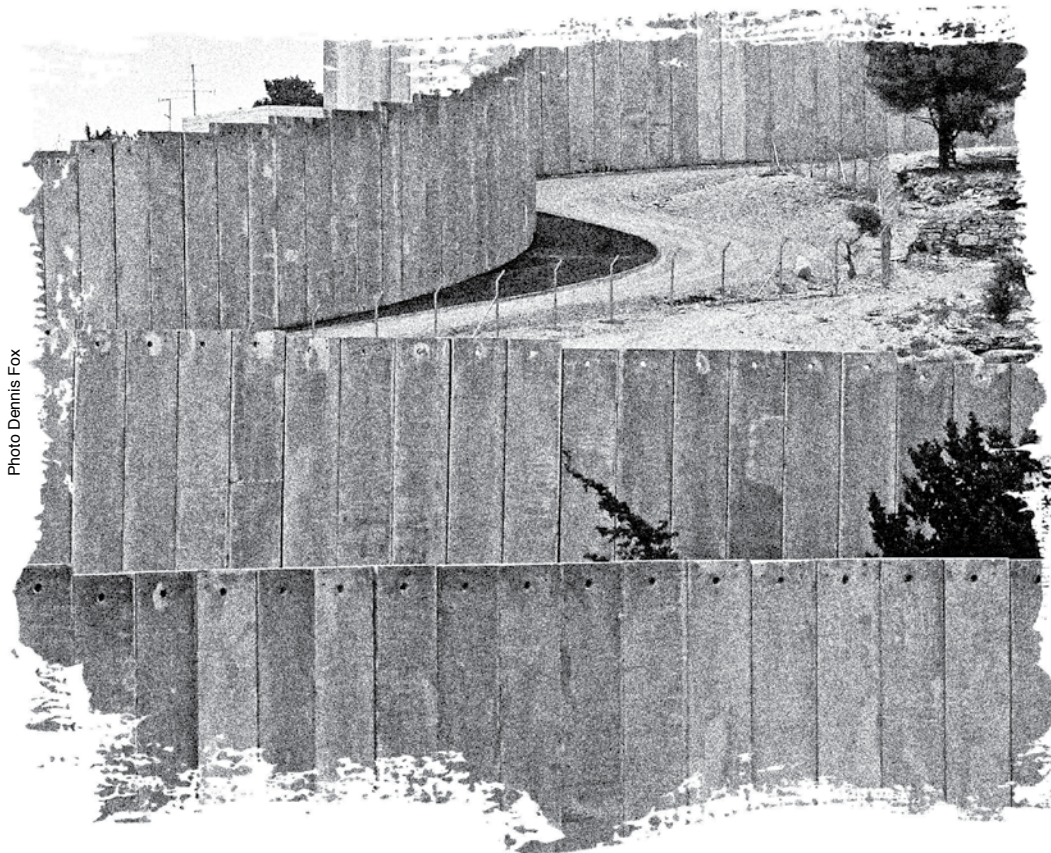


Photo Dennis Fox



# Call to Action

**T**he favorable time is now—and the churches are called. It is clear that the political process has failed to bring about the changes that will result in a just and lasting peace in Israel and Palestine. We know that when politics fail to bring about the necessary changes in our laws, political systems and policies at home and abroad, social movements arise from the grassroots to inform and drive the process of change. We believe firmly that the churches can lead the movement to bring peace to Israel and Palestine. The churches have done this before. We recall the pastors and theologians of the German Confessing Church who opposed Nazism with the publication of the Barmen Declaration of 1934. We lift up the courageous actions of religious leaders who transformed our own society in fundamental ways during the Civil Rights movement. The support of the global church for the South African Christians who stood against Apartheid was critical in bringing about the end of that racist system. Throughout modern history, the churches have called the faithful to respond to the cry of the poor, the dispossessed and the oppressed. Today, we summon our fellow U.S. Christians to heed this present call to action, in activities that include education, worship, political advocacy and nonviolent direct action on individual, local and denominational levels:

The favorable  
time is **now**—  
and the churches  
are **called**.

## Education and awareness

“Education ... [helps] us get to know the other as he or she really is rather than through the prism of conflict, hostility or religious fanaticism.” (Kairos Palestine document, 9.2) There is a rich and growing body of study materials produced by denominational and ecumenical organizations for this very purpose. We encourage our congregations, church networks and denominations to make use of written and video materials about the history, facts and people of Israel and Palestine as part of Bible study, adult and youth education and community-based events.

## Come and see

The Kairos Palestine document invites us to observe the Palestinian reality first hand. “In order to understand our reality, we say to the churches: Come and see. ... You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike.” (6.2) There is no substitute for witnessing directly the reality of Palestine today and for direct contact with the people of the land. We commit ourselves to facilitating the “coming as pilgrims,” as the Kairos Palestine document urges, to see “the truth of our reality.” We urge those who are unable to make such a pilgrimage to listen to those who have visited, lived and worked with Israelis and Palestinians. We call for a new openness to the testimony of those who have tasted the hospitality of the people of the land.

We urge all who visit to forgo the comfort and allure of heavily-subsidized travel with its slanted perspective and selective experience. In particular we call upon clergy and laypersons not to accept “free” trips to the Holy Land, since these trips most often seek not to reveal but to obscure the truth about the occupation

Come and **see**. You will know the facts  
and **the people of this land**, Palestinians  
and Israelis alike.

Palestine Kairos document

of Palestinian lands, the oppression of the Palestinian people and the damage that this situation inflicts on Israeli society.

## Relationship with and support for civil society

We urge American Christians to reach out in friendship to Palestinian Christians, to Palestinian Muslims and to Jews in Israel who are working to foster relationships with their Palestinian neighbors. Specific ways of pursuing these relationships include: sister relationships with churches and communities in Israel and Palestine; alliances with and support for civil society organizations, including schools, hospitals and non-governmental organizations in Israel and Palestine; selling Palestinian crafts and agricultural products at church events and conferences; support for specific development and education projects; and volunteering for peace and reconciliation work through church and civil society organizations—for example, the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel and Christian Peacemaker Teams.

## Worship, spiritual disciplines and congregational life

Worship and spiritual practices are central to Christian discipleship and, as works of piety, they are themselves powerful actions we take to embody our commitment to glorifying a God of radical love and grace. We encourage Christians to remember their baptism as a special calling to a new life of discipleship, a calling that at times may require bold and unpopular action. Jesus taught us to pray for God’s reign to come “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10) and to persevere in prayer

(Luke 11:5-12). We therefore urge Christians to pray fervently and persistently for a just peace in Israel and Palestine; for those who are oppressed that they may be freed; and also for those who have constructed and promoted the unjust system, that their hearts and minds might be healed and changed, and to do this both in private devotions and in public liturgies. In the ritual of communion, Christians can experience unity with Christ and with Christians worldwide. Remembering our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters during World

**It is essential that there be open discussion and active theological inquiry—in our churches, communities and institutions of higher learning.**

Communion Sunday or in other communion liturgies strengthens our bonds of love across geographical and political boundaries. Practices of fasting and almsgiving, often observed during the season of Lent, are acts of sacrifice that can both express contrition for our complicity in injustice and offer concrete means of support for those suffering oppression.

Selling Palestinian olive oil and crafts at church Christmas markets is a powerful way to support Palestinian civil society and to educate people about Palestinian life. Many congregations have established a social justice committee to deal specifically with Israel and Palestine in sponsoring educational programs, pilgrimages and mission programs. Finally, we urge preaching from the pulpit on this topic, connecting the Gospel to the urgent cry for justice in Palestine and Israel.

## **Theology**

Jesus enjoins us to “interpret the present time” (Luke 12:54-56). Theology is one way by which we discern the signs of the times—making meaning of what is happening in our lives and in the world around us, and clarifying what we are called to do as followers of Jesus. We acknowledge, however, that too often theology has become the handmaiden of uncritical support of the State of Israel on the part of church institutions, state bodies and the academy. Unwritten “red lines” block any challenge—in the classroom, from the pulpit, in the press and in the halls of our government—to the theological and political assumptions that underlie our unquestioning support for the State of Israel. This captivity of theology is an intolerable and frankly dangerous situation. If there is ever to be peace in Israel and Palestine, it is essential that there be open discussion and active theological inquiry—in our churches, communities and institutions of higher learning. We look forward to the production of books, articles and features in scholarly journals, popular media and church publications, church and community education and Bible study and the vigorous treatment of this topic in conferences and symposia across a wide range of disciplines.

## **Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions**

For years most of the world has condemned Israel's human rights violations, while the United States has effectively blocked any actions to bring pressure to bear on the policies of the State of Israel with respect to the Palestinians. In 2005, Palestinian civil society initiated the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign as a legitimate, nonviolent movement to uphold human rights and international law. Participation in the BDS movement by U.S. churches, notably in the form of initiatives to divest church funds from companies profiting from the occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza, has generated critically-important discussions at local, denominational and ecumenical levels about the responsibility of the church to act. It has also

generated intense controversy. Opposition, from Jewish organizations as well as from voices within the churches, has often been fierce, claiming that such actions will inflict grievous damage on hard-won positive relationships with the Jewish community. Many express fear that these actions may encourage anti-Semitism. We note with distress that many have confused these actions with anti-Jewish discrimination and persecution in the Christian past. But BDS is directed at Israeli policy, not the state itself or its citizens, and certainly not against the Jewish people. Divestment and other forms of socially responsible investing (SRI) are not directed against groups, nor are they intended to hurt individuals, corporations or states. They are, rather, directed at unjust, oppressive policies and are about promoting our own values and stated commitments by noncooperation with evil. Furthermore, methods to exert economic pressure on governments and companies, in addition to being a legal, ethical and time-tested way of influencing the political process and corporate behavior, serve to increase awareness, promote open discussion and create the grassroots support required to urge governments to take effective action and to change unjust policies. We urge congregations, clergy and church leaders to become educated about the BDS movement and to consider the many forms that it can take on personal, local and national levels.

## **Political advocacy**

A just and sustainable peace in Israel and Palestine depends on a political solution based on justice and fairness. We hold our own government largely responsible for the continuation of conflict and suffering on the part of both Palestinians and Israelis because the conditions that stand in the way of such a peace are financed and diplomatically protected by our government. We therefore urge Christians in the United States to advocate with our government for a foreign policy that demonstrates a commitment to justice for Palestinians and to a sustainable peace for all the peoples of the land.



# A Time for Choices

**C**hurches in the United States are awakening to the desperate situation of the Palestinians—Christians and Muslims—living under occupation, and to the enormity of loss and dispossession suffered by Palestinians as the result of the establishment of the State of Israel. We are also aware of the irrefutable mandates of international law and human rights that call to us to action, as well as the biblically and theologically-based principles that summon us to witness and to act. In renewed faithfulness to the Gospel, we invite our church leaders and our fellow sisters and brothers in Christ to join us in discipleship in this Kairos moment. We appeal to our government to be faithful to the principles of universal, God-endowed human rights, human dignity and justice articulated in its foundational documents. We call to mind Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s charge to our society in his historic speech on the Vietnam War at Riverside Church in 1967. "These are the times," Dr. King told us, "for real choices and not false ones. We are at the moment when our lives must be placed on the line if our nation is to survive its own folly. Every [person] of humane convictions must decide on the protest that best suits his convictions, but we must all protest." Today, the churches of the Holy Land are calling us to stand

with them in their nonviolent struggle. How can we do otherwise?

In closing we bring to mind the day Jesus entered Jerusalem, accompanied by his followers and some shouting:

"As [Jesus] was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!'"

The local authorities were displeased. Your singing and praising and proclaiming, they told Jesus, would disrupt the establish order, threatening to spoil the accommodation they had made with the Empire. "'Teacher,' they said to him, 'order your disciples to stop!' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, *the stones would shout out*'" (Luke 19:37-40).

Whether praise or protest, you cannot silence the cry of the oppressed nor suppress the human hunger

In renewed faithfulness to the Gospel, **we summon** our church leaders and all our fellow Christians **to discipleship** in response to this Kairos moment.



Photo Paul Buck

for justice for all of God's children. And what was all the noise about, after all? It was the spontaneous response of an oppressed, occupied people—a cry of love, adoration and sheer joy for the miracle of Jesus' ministry—his power to heal, to inspire, to lead. You can't stop this! Jesus was saying. Nature itself, even these seeming inert stones, resonates with the joy and life force emanating from the people.

**I**n writing this statement we are declaring that the time has come for us to do some shouting. We offer this Call to Action in gratitude for the gift of this Kairos, this divine summons to read the signs of the times and to recognize that the favorable time has arrived. Let us celebrate the appearance of this time as we set out the path we will follow, as individuals and as communities. It is a path that may bring pain, loss and cost, but one that leads to the fulfilling of God's will: "to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

**Kairos USA is a movement to unify and mobilize American Christians—lay, academic and clergy—to respond faithfully and boldly to the urgent situation in Israel and Palestine.**

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The **mission** of the Church is prophetic, to speak the Word of God **courageously**, honestly and lovingly in the local context and **in the midst** of daily events.

“A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering,” Kairos Palestine document, 2009



Photo Ahmad Mesleh

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