

FAIR WITNESS

Christians for Fair Witness on the Middle East

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1960
New York, New York 10115
(212) 870-2320
www.christianfairwitness.com

The Kairos Palestine Document

On December 11, 2009, a group of Palestinian Christian leaders issued the “Kairos Palestine” document. They describe this document as “a word of faith, hope and love,” offered at a time when, according to the drafters, Palestinians have “reached a dead end” because of the Israeli occupation. According to this document the only answer is to call for divestment and economic boycott of “everything produced by the [Israeli] occupation.” But are their conclusions sound -- and is economic boycott of Israel the just solution?

The Kairos Palestine document was written by Palestinian Christians. It is their narrative, their truth and they rightfully express it.

- But the U.S. Churches should not adopt this narrative without bringing a critical eye and ear to bear upon it and without similarly listening to an Israeli narrative which also has its truth.

The Kairos Palestine document calls the Israeli occupation a sin that must be removed. (Sec. 4.2.1) We agree . . .

- The occupation has had a corrosive effect on the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis. One people should never rule over or dominate another.

The Kairos Palestine document states that “[the Palestinian] connectedness to this land is a natural right.” (Sec. 2.3.4) We agree . . .

- But the Jewish connectedness to the land is also a natural right. Both people’s legitimate claims to the land can and must be accommodated through a negotiated two-state solution.

The Kairos Palestine document professes that “an end to Israeli occupation . . . will guarantee security and peace for all.” (Sec. 7) . . . But is that the truth?

- There was no security or peace prior to the occupation. During the British Mandate, waves of Jewish immigration brought increasingly violent Arab reactions.
- Violence broke out almost immediately after the November 29, 1947 announcement of the U.N. partition plan separating Israel/Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab-Palestinian states. Increasingly violent attacks by Arabs against Jews were followed by Jewish reprisals. This was twenty years before the occupation and prior to the creation of the state of Israel.
- One day after Israel declared independence, five Arab states attacked the new Jewish state. The 1948/49 war ended with Armistice Agreements. But there was not peace. All of Israel’s borders were closed and every Arab country boycotted Israel. Hundreds of Israelis were

killed and wounded in terror attacks launched mostly from bases in Jordan and the Syrian Golan Heights.

- In 1964 -- three years before the occupation -- the Palestine Liberation Organization was founded. It established a Palestine Liberation Army in order “to attain the objective of liquidating Israel.”
- The occupation must end, but there is no reason to believe that ending the occupation alone will bring security and peace to Israel and Palestine.

According to the drafters of the Kairos Palestine document the “clear Israeli response [to efforts to end the conflict] refusing any solution, leaves no room for positive expectation” and so “economic sanctions and boycotts [must] be applied against Israel.”(Secs. 3.1 and 7) But is this the truth?

- No reasonable or honest person would find Israel blameless in this conflict. The Israeli government has made its share of mistakes and there is a strong and vocal segment of Israeli society that feels justified in claiming all of historic Israel as their own. But this expansionist mentality and lack of interest in accommodating Palestinian statehood has not been the majority Israeli position in recent years.
- Israel acquired the Palestinian Territories in 1967 defending itself from the massed threat of combined Arab armies amidst escalating provocations. Within days of the war ending, Israel tried to open negotiations for land in exchange for peace. The League of Arab States met in Khartoum and announced that there would be no peace, no recognition and no negotiations with Israel.
- In December 2000, President Clinton made a proposal in Washington D.C. The Palestinians would get all of Gaza, about 97% of contiguous West Bank territory, East Jerusalem for their capital, three Quarters of the Old City, sovereignty over the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa mosques and \$30 billion. This would have ended the occupation. PM Barak accepted. It was the Palestinian leadership that said no.
- In September 2008, Israeli PM Ehud Olmert extended an offer to Palestinian President Abbas. The Palestinians would have gotten all of Gaza, about 97% of contiguous West Bank territory. What was Arab in Jerusalem would be part of the new Palestinian state, what was Jewish would be part of Israel. The holy sites would come under the control of an international (Israeli, Palestinian, U.S., Jordanian & Saudi) consortium. President Abbas never responded to this offer.

Fair Witness therefore strongly encourages U.S. Churches to read the Kairos Palestine document with an open heart but not with an uncritical mind. We also encourage our churches to seize the current opportunity to act as peacemakers by encouraging resumption of direct talks -- and not fostering the flames of conflict by punishing one side through acts of divestment and boycott.