

## 8th Day Center for Justice: Statement on the Conflict between Israel and Palestine

*"We believe that this dignity is one and the same in each and all of us." Kairos 2.1*

For centuries Jews and Arabs lived together in the territory of Israel peacefully. Palestinians became strangers in their own land starting with the mass expulsion of 800,000 in 1948 to the most recent invasion of 2014. Wrapped in the narrative that Israel was "a land with no people for a people with no land"; Palestinians were erased from the beginning despite their own ancient claim to the land.

The United States, which gives Israel 3.3 billion dollars a year, frames the conflict as: Israel is our strongest ally in the region and protects our interests. Our ally language is joined with a narrative that casts Jews as victims and Arabs as perpetrators. While there is a history of violence against Jewish communities, the majority of the responsibility for that history belongs to Western countries, not the Palestinians. The news cycle in the West that privileges images of rockets fired by Palestinians while omitting stories of destroyed homes, impoverished schools, imprisoned children, and brutalizing checkpoints reinforces the distorted narrative told by Western powers.

Religious language has been layered over the occupation of land from the beginning. Professor Beit-Hallahmi of Haifa University wrote, "...most Israelis today, as a result of Israeli education, regard the Bible as a reliable source of historical information of a secular, political kind." (Masalha & Isherwood, p. 67) Religious language and biblical histories serve as an emotionally charged smoke screen away from central questions of human rights, sovereignty and territory. The image of a God who takes land from one people for another has no place in any of the Abrahamic faiths and no legitimacy as foundation for statehood. The complex intertwining of Israel as God's destiny for Jewish people and as protection from another Holocaust creates a potent narrative that completely denies the existence of Palestinians.

In 2011 a group of Palestinian Christians wrote, *Kairos Palestine*, a document that gives voice to the religious perspective of Palestinian Christians and articulates their theology of land, neighbor and sovereignty. From a Palestinian perspective God has not chosen a people for a place instead God calls for justice and reconciliation. "Our

question to our brothers and sisters in the church today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back?" (*Kairos*, Chapter 6.1)

As Christians in the West we are connected not only through our shared beliefs but also through the role of our government in the conflict. Palestinian Liberation Theology calls for: stopping the abuse of biblical texts, strengthening non-violent resistance specifically addressing global Christian communities to understand inaction as violent action, addressing Israel as an extension of the American empire, and strengthening Muslim and Christian relations. (Masalha & Isherwood, p. 34)

8th Day Center for Justice has worked closely with Palestinian and Jewish groups for decades. We have seen through staff delegations, the suffering of our Palestinian partners, and dismay of our Jewish partners just how devastating the conflict has been. We invite you to consider the attached action steps for your own community's study and reflection. We offer these steps as a way to support a robust peace process that is free from outside political agendas, honors all peoples, removes false religious narratives, calls for end to occupation, mandates equal protection under the law, and allows for the right to return (U.N. Resolution 194).

Masalha Nur, & Isherwood Lisa, (2014) *Theologies of Liberation in Palestine*

*Kairos Palestine* [www.kairospalestine.ps](http://www.kairospalestine.ps)