

# Motion to engage the issue of a “Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel” in the coming year

For Consideration at Wisconsin Conference 2024 Annual Meeting

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What actions does the Motion call for?

- Calls for congregations in the Wisconsin Conference to engage the issue of a just peace between Palestine and Israel in the coming year, through study of the 2021 General Synod Resolution “Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel” that was passed overwhelmingly by UCC General Synod 33, in 2021.
- Calls for congregations to consider a possible resolution of witness at the 2025 Wisconsin Conference Annual Meeting that would endorse and affirm the 2021 General Synod Resolution “Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel.”

### What is the 2021 General Synod Resolution titled “Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel” about, and what does it seek to do?

The resolution “[Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel](#)”<sup>1</sup> is an educational and theological document written by members of the [United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network](#)<sup>2</sup>, including former UCC President John Thomas. It gives us a set of principles that must be in place and honored in any just and peaceful relationship between Israel and Palestine. The resolution clarifies that justice is the basic principle which must guide a peaceful future for Israel and Palestine. This includes following the message of the Hebrew prophets and the life and teachings of Jesus, and also following applicable international laws.

The resolution recognizes that all people living in Palestine and Israel are created in the image of God, giving dignity and sacredness to everyone living in those lands. The resolution rejects any system that would grant any one nation, race, culture, or religion more rights, privileges, or dignity than any other group. Writers of the resolution hope it will inspire curiosity and study. The writers hope for deepened interest in and support of our UCC [Mission Partners](#)<sup>3</sup> in Palestine, responsible travel to the Holy Land, and advocacy for a just peace.

## Why is it important at this time to study the issue of a just peace between Palestine and Israel?

- U.S. financial and political support of Israel’s occupation of Palestine—an occupation conducted in gross violation of international humanitarian law—has intensified, not decreased. In recent years, the U.S. provided far greater financial support for Israeli domination than ever before. This includes the ending of United Nations Relief and Works Administration ([UNRWA](#))<sup>4</sup> funding, which has resulted in needless suffering and death. The U.S. has continued its complicity in the construction of new Israeli settlements and the seizure of great swaths of Palestinian land (in clear violation of international law) in the West Bank. As well, new laws are being enacted in the U.S. which restrict Americans’ freedom to speak about Israel. Likewise, laws restricting the use of nonviolent economic boycotts—a time-honored tactic for positive change—have now expanded to [38 states](#)<sup>5</sup>, including Wisconsin.
- The past year has seen a phenomenal escalation in the amount of death and destruction brought by Israeli military and settlers, and also the October 7, 2023 attack by members of Hamas militias that killed approximately 1,200 Israeli citizens. Be assured, the Wisconsin Conference Palestine Justice Working Group, which originated the motion to study the 2021 General Synod resolution, [condemns](#) the violence perpetrated Hamas militias on October 7, 2023, as well as the ongoing Israeli military and settler violence targeting citizens of both Gaza and the West Bank.

This massive increase in violence has occurred precisely because the principles set forth in the 2021 UCC General Synod resolution have not been followed. If we in the UCC are to continue answering the call of Jesus to be peacemakers, our peacemaking efforts must begin with a solid, foundational understanding of the conditions for peace, as documented in the 2021 General Synod resolution.

- Members of Palestinian civil society—Christians, Muslims, and others—have repeatedly and urgently called for our support to end the decades-long military occupation. See especially [Kairos Palestine 2009: A moment of truth, A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering](#)<sup>6</sup> and [Kairos Palestine 2020: Cry for Hope: A call to decisive action](#)<sup>7</sup>.
- For decades, [UCC Mission Partners](#)<sup>3</sup> in the West Bank of Palestine and Gaza have received delegations of visitors and shown them the obstacles and repression they face every day. Today, amidst ever-increasing human rights abuses, they plead for us to learn about the situation in Palestine and Israel, and help bring peace and justice to the region.

## **What is the UCC's history with Palestine and Palestinians? What are our relationships with Palestinian Christians and their churches and institutions?**

The United Church of Christ has more than 200 years of engagement in the Middle East through its historical mission agencies, starting in the early 19th century. The United Church of Christ has been directly involved in support for Palestinian rights, especially Palestinian refugees, dating back to the mid-1960s, not long after our denomination came into being. The first resolution of the UCC's General Synod was adopted within weeks of the 1967 ("Six Day") war, supporting a "permanent peace in the Middle East" and the "just treatment for the Arab refugees and relief of their suffering." Since its establishment 25 years ago, Global Ministries, the common mission agency of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), has been responsible for nurturing Global Mission Partnerships for the UCC. Those partners include a wide range of churches and organizations in Palestine-Israel and the Middle East, among them church denominations, Christian religious councils and agencies, human rights advocacy organizations, and others. A list of current UCC Partners in Palestine-Israel can be found [here](#)<sup>3</sup>. Over the years, the UCC and Disciples of Christ have also appointed mission personnel to serve with these partner organizations.

## **What does the Declaration say or imply about our church's relationships with Jews and Jewish partners in interfaith endeavors?**

In common with the UCC, our Jewish colleagues hold many concerns for social justice and public welfare. Our responsibility as Christians is to be as open as possible to cooperation wherever we see that interfaith work can effectively address common problems and issues. The Declaration for a Just Peace in no way prohibits or undermines cooperation with Jewish friends or Jewish groups in tackling problems that are shared by people of many faiths. In fact, such cooperation may open opportunities for greater understanding and communication about matters that cause us disagreement.

Through General Synod resolutions, the UCC has affirmed its relationship with Jewish communities (1987) and with Muslim communities (1989). It has expressed abhorrence of anti-Semitism (1983 and 2001), and has spoken against actions of hostility against Islam and the Muslim community (2011). The UCC has expressed its commitment to interreligious dialogue, and is engaged in dialogue with both Jews and Muslims through the actions of many local congregations and through its participation in the National Council of Churches.

## **Does modern Israel inherit the promises made to Abraham?**

In the book of Genesis, God makes promises to Abraham (the father of Judaism). God promises rich blessings on Abraham and his descendants (Abraham, promising that his descendants

would inherit the land of Israel (Genesis 15:18). The promise is repeated in Genesis 17:7-9 and Genesis 26:2-4. Abraham is told three things: He will have many descendants, they will possess a particular territory (today's Holy Land), and they will be a blessing to all nations. In Genesis 17:7 this promise is called an "everlasting covenant." All of this happened, over 4,000 years ago.

Today, some argue that Jews inherit this promise unconditionally, in the form of the modern nation state of Israel. Therefore, they believe, the modern state of Israel (which identifies itself as a Jewish state) may make a divine claim that all of the Holy Land should be in its possession and control. This is not an argument based in international law. Rather, it is a theological argument based on a particular interpretation of Scripture. The argument goes like this: "God gave the Holy Land to the Jews in the Bible, and that should settle any modern-day political debates."

Ironically, Christians often fail to think *as Christians* about the covenant promises. In the New Testament we read that Jesus has appeared and that he has started a new covenant. And here is the key: *Does Jesus' new covenant change the covenants that came before?* Hebrews 8:13 says yes in its comment on Jeremiah 31:31-34 (regarding the new covenant). Jesus' kingdom is like new wine placed into old wineskins.

The people of the old covenant have not been rejected or replaced; instead, the old covenant has been expanded to include all races and nations. Jews are not excluded; along with all the world, they are invited in to join this new community.

In the words of the [Palestinian Christians](#)<sup>6</sup>, "We believe that our 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. In light of the teachings of the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political program, but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. It [the promise made to Abraham] was the initiation of the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God on earth."

Note: The first four paragraphs in this section were abstracted with permission from [www.christianzionism.org](http://www.christianzionism.org)—a website edited by leading Biblical scholars that challenges the misguided beliefs and practices of Christian Zionism.

### **Is the Declaration for a Just Peace anti-Semitic?**

No. The Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel strenuously calls for an end to the violence that harms both Israelis and Palestinians. The Declaration reminds us that UCC General Synod has repeatedly called for a future for Israel and Palestine based on justice and security for all, and the principle of self-determination enshrined in international law.

The American organization [Jewish Voice for Peace](#)<sup>8</sup> says the following about anti-Semitism: “Criticism of Jews for being Jewish is anti-Semitic; however, criticism of actions or policies of the state of Israel is not anti-Semitic.”

This is an important distinction. We don’t object to Israel’s right to exist. Rather, we object to illegal settlements, human rights violations, and governmental structures that oppress Palestinians.

Objecting to human rights violations by the government of China doesn’t make one anti-Asian or anti-Chinese. When any country violates human rights, it needs to change.

The United Church of Christ itself, as well as the UCC Palestine Israel Network (that includes members from across the UCC) and the Wisconsin Conference Palestine Justice Working Group stand firmly opposed to all forms of racial, ethnic, or religious bias or hatred. We stand firmly against and actively work to challenge any form of anti-Semitism.

### **Does Israel have the right under international law to occupy and control land beyond its immediate borders?**

During World War II, the Axis powers (notably Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan) seized and occupied countries and territories without concern for the health, safety, and basic rights of the people living in those lands. By the end of World War II, the world had seen enough of this behavior and wished to put an end to it. They held the Fourth Geneva Convention, and listed requirements for treatment of people during war and occupation. They also created the United Nations, with laws regarding nations’ actions.

Article 2(4) of the United Nations charter states clearly that the use of force to acquire land (as was common up to that time) is no longer legally permissible. Israel’s use of military force to occupy and control the West Bank and Gaza violates this key provision of the United Nations charter. The United Nations has consistently stated and ruled that Israel’s military occupation is illegal.

There are several legal methods for a country to take land beyond its immediate borders. What these methods of acquiring land have in common is that land transfer can occur only if the people affected by the transfer agree to it, and if this agreement follows an extended period of peace, not during times of conflict. Israel’s actions do not suggest it is pursuing such peaceful methods in the case of the West Bank or Gaza.

## What are some recommended ways to study the issue of a just peace in Palestine and Israel? What resources are available to congregations?

Study of the 2021 General Synod resolution can occur in a variety of settings. For example, a church board or a church committee may wish to devote one or several meetings to the topic. Reading groups may select this topic for their monthly reading. The church may arrange a film series, or pull together a study group.

- Consider this six-session [study guide](#)<sup>9</sup> prepared especially for congregational study. See also this excellent [video](#)<sup>10</sup> encouraging congregations to study and endorse the Declaration for a Just Peace resolution.
- Arrange for members of your congregation to view any of the films (videos) or study the texts listed in the *Recommended Study Resources*<sup>11</sup> document provided by the Wisconsin Conference Palestine Justice Working Group.
- Send one or more members of your congregation to the Holy Land on an alternative (responsible) tour. A list of recommended alternative tour operators can be found in the *Recommended Study Resources*<sup>11</sup> document. Have your members “report back” what they saw and heard.
- Read news articles about Israel-Palestine in these online publications: [The Electronic Intifada](#)<sup>12</sup>, [Mondoweiss](#)<sup>13</sup>, [If Americans Knew](#)<sup>14</sup>, [Al-Jazeera \(in English\)](#)<sup>15</sup>, [Friends of Sabeel-North America \(FOSNA\)](#)<sup>16</sup>, [Jewish Voice for Peace](#)<sup>17</sup>.
- Invite a Palestinian-born speaker or a speaker from the Wisconsin Conference Palestine Justice Working Group to meet with your congregation. Contacts from the Palestine Justice Working Group include Thomas Beilman ([thomas.beilman@gmail.com](mailto:thomas.beilman@gmail.com)), Rev. Diane Dulin ([diane.dulin1@gmail.com](mailto:diane.dulin1@gmail.com)), Rev. RaeAnn Beebe ([revrae10@gmail.com](mailto:revrae10@gmail.com)), and Lisa Hart, Associate Conference Minister for Faith Formation and Justice Ministries and Executive Associate to the Wisconsin Conference Minister ([lhart@wcucc.org](mailto:lhart@wcucc.org)).
- Sign up to receive the [Wisconsin Conference Life](#)<sup>18</sup> bi-monthly newsletter, to learn of webinars or seminars focused on this issue.
- Subscribe to the UCC Palestine-Israel Network (UCC PIN) [e-newsletter](#)<sup>19</sup> that is chock full of information about this subject.
- For questions about “who owns the land of Palestine and Israel,” the distinguished professor Gary Burge offers a highly readable treatment in his widely available book, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians*. This book has been recommended by Global Ministries.

## Footnotes

- (1) <https://www.globalministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/General-Synod-2021-Resolution-I-P.pdf>
- (2) <https://www.uccpin.org>
- (3) <https://www.globalministries.org/regions/mee/mee-partners/>
- (4) <https://www.unrwa.org>
- (5) <https://justvision.org/boycott/legislation-tracker>
- (6) [www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document](http://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-kairos/kairos-palestine-document)
- (7) <https://www.cryforhope.org/media/attachments/2020/06/30/cry-for-hope-english.pdf>
- (8) [www.jvp.org](http://www.jvp.org)
- (9) <https://bit.ly/DeclarationStudyGuide>
- (10) <https://vimeo.com/503182618>
- (11) For an e-mail copy of the *Recommended Study Resources* document, contact [thomas.beilman@gmail.com](mailto:thomas.beilman@gmail.com)
- (12) <https://electronicintifada.net>
- (13) <https://mondoweiss.net>
- (14) <https://israelpalestineneews.org>
- (15) <https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/>
- (16) <https://www.fosna.org>
- (17) <https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org>
- (18) <https://www.wcucc.org/about-wcucc/1446-2/>
- (19) <https://www.uccpin.org/newsletter-registration>

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