



# World Student Christian Federation

## **A Policy Paper on Palestine**

*(Approved on March 5, 2015 by the delegates and participants of the WSCF 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held at ACJ/YMCA Bogota Auditorium, Bogota, Colombia.)*

For over a century, the World Student Christian Federation has been aspiring to attain social justice and change. The World Student Christian Federation's work manifests throughout the world through their hope for a justice centered future in which human rights are universal.

### Overall Position:

The basis of The World Student Christian Federation's view on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is based on International Law; Human Rights Law International Humanitarian Law, International Conventions and the call from the Palestinian Kairos Document. Therefore, we seek to restore justice and work for a just and lasting peace in the Holy land.

And thus, we formulate the following positions:

1. We call to end the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and all forms of discrimination; as this occupation is a crime against God and humanity.
2. Jerusalem must be an open and shared city for the two peoples and the three Abrahamic religions.
3. The Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – including East Jerusalem – are illegal under International Law and must be dismantled.

4. We call to revisit theological positions that support certain unjust political options with regard to the Palestinians; theologies that legitimize the Israeli Occupation of the Palestinian land.
5. The Wall constructed by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian territories is a breach of international law and must be dismantled.
6. Palestinians' right of self-determination must be respected, as should be the right of return.
7. Maintaining just peace and a sustainable solution to the conflict is only achieved through peaceful means. Violence cannot be justified whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians.
8. We call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanction of the occupation, as a non-violent tool for justice, peace and security.
9. We call churches and ecumenical organizations worldwide to visit the occupied Palestinian territory in accordance with Kairos Palestine call under "Come and See"
10. We call upon the Regional and National WSCF and SCMs to educate their members on the conflict and be engaged in solidarity activities with the Palestinian people and with justice- building initiatives

\* Background Information

In 1948, the State of Israel was announced; on a day that is still commemorated today in Palestinian history as the Nakba (Catastrophe) Day. The process of the creation of a Jewish nation started in the late 1800s. As European societies were becoming more and more anti-Semitic, the First Zionist Congress took place, which resulted in the creation of the Zionist Organization in 1897 and the birth of the idea of a Jewish State. The Zionists realized from their early beginnings that an imperial power's support would be of vital importance. And thus, they reached for the British, who in turn viewed political Zionism favorably. Britain's main role became clear in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which Britain announced that "His Majesty's government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object." At that time, Jews made up less than 10% of Palestine's population.

The Jewish immigration rate to Palestine increased rapidly, and by the end of the Second World War there were over half a million Jewish Immigrants living in Palestine. This triggered an uprising of the Arab population, who greatly opposed the immigration of Jews to their lands. By the time Britain had decided to get out of Palestine, the Jews, who already had very effective lobbying groups, particularly in the United States, had 33 nations voting in favor of a Partition of Palestine; a land with a population that was more than two thirds Arab, and of which the Jewish population possessed just over 6%. The Partition Plan handed over 55.5% of Palestine to the proposed Jewish state. Since the Palestinian Arab population would make up more than half the population of the new Jewish state, by the time of the unilateral declaration of Israeli statehood in May 1948, most Zionist leaders were prepared for the forced "transfer" of the Arab population.

Late 1947 and throughout 1948 until early 1949, Palestinian society was dismantled, Palestinian villages and towns were destroyed, more than half of the Palestinian population (an estimated 1.3 million) were displaced by the Zionist militia and the state of Israel. An estimated four in every five Palestinian towns and villages inside Israel were either destroyed or immediately settled by Jews. By May 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed on 78% of the Palestinian land.

During the “Six Day War” in June 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. The UN Security Council passed resolution 242 of 1967, which called for Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied and acquired by war in that year, and sovereignty and security of all states in the region, but this was not implemented.

Facts on the ground:

More than six decades since the Nakba, the Palestinian refugees still lack access to and are denied any durable solution or reparation as per International Law and UN resolutions, including the right of return to their homes of origin. This right is enshrined in UN resolutions, however these resolutions have not been enforced. (Badil, 2010A) By the end of 2008, approximately 67% of the entire Palestinian population worldwide were forcibly displaced persons, including 6.6 million Palestinian refugees and 455,000 internally displaced persons. (Badil, 2008) A third of all Palestinian refugees still live in 58 refugee camps across the Middle East. (UNRWA) The Palestinian refugees are the largest and longest-lasting refugee population in the world. In fact, two out of every five refugees in the world are Palestinian. (Badil, 2010B)

Settlement is illegal under international humanitarian law. IHL states that that an occupying power is not allowed to make permanent changes to the territory it occupies, and according to the 4th Geneva convention, article 49, "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies". Despite this, Israeli settlements continue to be built and expanded on land confiscated from Palestinians in the West Bank. According to the UNHCR (2013), approximately 250 settlements have been established since 1967 in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, with a population of approximately 520'000. The settlement outposts, numbering at approximately 100 in 2012 (B'tselem, 2014), do not have official government recognition, although many of them were established with governmental assistance. The government of Israel fails to evacuate these outposts, most built on private Palestinian land, and instead often provide them with financial support. In a number of cases, these illegal outposts are retroactively legalized (Al Haq, 2013). These settlements are connected by bypass roads. Since 1967, Israel has cleared and paved hundreds of kilometers of bypass roads, which are for the sole use of Israelis. These roads isolate and separate communities. (Peace Now, 2005) Settlers often harass and attack Palestinians and their property. The Israeli settlers' attacks on Palestinians and their property are disregarded by the IOF; in fact many attacks are carried out with their protection. These attacks include attacks on land and trees, assault of people, attacks on cars and houses, attacks on religious and historic sites, and settlement expansion. (Arij, 2013)

The Israeli Government decided to construct a wall in 2002, with the declared aim of preventing terrorist attacks by Palestinian militants. (OCHAOPT) However, 85% is located within the West Bank, to the east of the internationally-recognized Green Line (Richard Falk, 2014), demonstrating that the Wall is a part of the system of physical and administrative barriers aimed at restricting Palestinian movement and access to services and resources throughout the West Bank (OCHAOPT). In some areas, the Apartheid Wall consists of a concrete mass, ranging to a height of between 8 and 12 meters, with armed sniper towers, electrified fences, 30-100 meter buffer zones, razor wire, military patrols and military roads. Where the buffer zones exist, the road is paved for large-scale demolitions and expulsion of local Palestinian residents. (Stop the Wall, 2011) When the Apartheid Wall is completed, it is expected to run for 708km, effectively cutting off and isolating 9.4% of the West Bank territory. (Richard Falk, 2014) In 2004, the International Court of Justice ruled that the Apartheid Wall is illegal under International law, and Israel is obliged to stop the Wall's construction and dismantle what has been built already. (ICJ, 2004)

There are a multitude of Israeli checkpoints across the West Bank, along with road blocks and gates on the separation barrier, all of which restrict the free movement of the Palestinians. In February 2014 there were 99 fixed checkpoints in the West Bank: 59 are internal checkpoints, located well within the West Bank. (B'tselem, 2014) At the close of 2012, OCHA counted approximately 532 road blocks a month. These checkpoints may be closed at any time without prior notice, which prevents Palestinians from reaching workplaces, health facilities, schools, and so on. (B'tselem, 2007)

Over a fifth of the Palestinian population live in Poverty. Poverty in Gaza is twice as high as in the West Bank, at a rate of 33.7% in 2009. (World Bank, 2011). Not only does Israel control the crossings between Gaza Strip and the West Bank, but also it fully controls Gaza's air space and territorial waters. Movement in and out of Gaza, whether of people or goods, to the west bank or internationally, is virtually impossible. There are also restrictions on international trade. All of this contributes to the distortion of the economy of the occupied Palestinian territories, giving rise to high levels of poverty and unemployment, deep recession and decreased standard of living. (World Bank, 2011). Unemployment in Gaza was as high as 38% in 2010, with Youth unemployment higher, at 53.3%. (World Bank, 2011) Gaza's economy is also effected by numerous military operations that target civilians and their property. Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in 2008. 1,400 Palestinians were killed, including 300 children, and thousands were left homeless. (Amnesty International) Israel extensively targeted the infrastructure and residences. The economy, which was already in recession, was decimated (Amnesty International). On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, 2012 Israel launched Operation Pillar of Defense, in which 167 Palestinian were killed, 31 of whom were children. (Amnesty International, 2013)

Palestinians can be held by the Israeli military under administrative detention: a term used to justify keeping a Palestinian prisoner indefinitely, without charging them, giving them a fair trial, or even informing them of the suspicions against them. (Addameer, 2011A) While it is prohibited by International Law, the policy of administrative detention is used extensively, becoming more frequent after the second intifada. (Addameer, 2011B) Since 1967, over 750,000 Palestinians have been detained by Israel, which is roughly 20% of the Palestinian population (Richard Falk, 2013) Some 7,500

Palestinian children have been detained by Israeli occupation forces since the year 2000, according to DCI. Israel is the only country in the world that systematically prosecutes children in military courts. (DCI, 2013) Torture is being used, on children and adults, in jails and during interrogations. That includes: physical violence, verbal abuse, sleep deprivation, solitary confinement, threat to harm family members and tying in painful positions. (Addameer, 2011C)

Although several attempts were made to revive the Peace Process, which began in the early 1990's, none have succeeded to bring peace with justice to the region. This is caused by an unwillingness compromise on certain key issues, such as the status of Jerusalem, refugees, and settlements. In the case of the final status negotiations between 31/07/13 and 29/5/14, a freeze of settlement activity was agreed for the negotiations to transpire. However, these activities continued, for example, Israel approved the building of an estimated 17,388 units in 37 Israeli settlements in the West Bank in this period. (Poica, 2014)

#### Kairos Palestine:

Witnessing the transformation of the Word of God into dead letters; used to deprive the Palestinians of their own land and rights, also witnessing the calls for violence and holy wars against them in the name of God, the Palestinian Christians raised their voice from within the sufferings: A cry of faith, hope and love. In the Palestinian Kairos document, the Palestinians address all the churches and Christians across the world requesting them to stand against apartheid and injustice, calling them to turn away from the theologies that justify the Israeli Occupation of the Palestinian land. Furthermore, the document calls on political leaders and decision makers and all peoples to take legal measures against Israel until it complies with international law: ends its occupation of the Palestinian land and ends all forms of discrimination, oppression and apartheid. It also emphasizes the vital role of nonviolent resistance of the occupation, a creative resistance with love as its logic; not resisting with death but with the ultimate respect of life, a resistance that is not a tool of revenge, but a means that ends the existing evil; liberating not only the victims of injustice but also the perpetrators as well.

#### Terminology

*Occupied Palestinian Territory:* The term used by the United Nations and the International Court of Justice to refer to the *West Bank*, *Gaza Strip* and *East Jerusalem*: the territories conquered by Israel in 1967.

*East Jerusalem:* Israel has unilaterally expanded the municipal boundaries of the city and illegally annexed East Jerusalem, in 1967.

*Gaza Strip:* A territory of 360 square kilometers that is home for around 1.5 million Palestinians, considered part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

*Green Line:* it marks the division between the territories militarily occupied by Israel since 1967 and the territories recognized as Israel proper. It was set out by the Armistice Agreements, 1949, between Israel and the neighboring countries.

*Nakba*: The Arabic word for Catastrophe. It refers to the ethnic cleansing and dispossession of the Palestinians by Israel in 1948.

*The Peace Process*: initially referred to the official negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian political leaders since the early 1990s. Now, it expands to describe the ongoing international diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict.

Resources:

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- Geneva Convention IV relative to the protection of civilian persons in the time of war, 1949, available online at: <http://www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/385ec082b509e76c41256739003e636d/6756482d86146898c125641e004aa3c5>

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