

## About the motion to 2016 Synod concerning Church of Scotland report and the situation in Israel/Palestine

Havant URC Church is putting a motion to the Wessex Synod which hopefully will progress to the General Assembly in July 2016. Kairos Britain has encouraged other Kairos URC congregations to do likewise to make it more likely that the General Assembly will adopt it. URC Commitment for Life are also encouraging churches.

Trinity URC (St Albans) is a Kairos active community and has also for many years chosen to support the Palestine strand of the URC Commitment for Life programme. The Elders saw the Motion at their January meeting and agreed it should be discussed at the 21<sup>st</sup> Feb Church Meeting. However this may be two days too late to meet the submission date for the 12 March Thames Synod.

### Description of the Motion and the background to it

The motion commends the Church of Scotland 2013 report: ["The inheritance of Abraham? A report on the 'Promised Land'"](#) and endorses two of its main conclusions:

Conclusion1: Scripture does not offer any people a divine right to territory in the area of Israel/Palestine .

The Church of Scotland report examines three possible interpretations of scriptures:

- a territorial guarantee (unconditional promises for specific areas);
- a land held in trust (cared for and lived in according to Gods instructions);
- a 'promised land' that can be found – or built – anywhere.

The report concludes that Christians should not be supporting any claims to by any people to a right to possess territory.

Conclusion2: There is an inequality in power currently in Israel/Palestine and this must be addressed by the international community in order for there to a fair and effective solution to the situation.

The preamble to the Synod Motion enlarges further; only when the inequality in power between the parties is counterbalanced by effective international pressure on Israel to end the occupation and blockade of Gaza, can there be effective peace negotiations delivering a just peace.

The preamble also notes that "criticisms of the Government of Israel are not criticisms of Jewish people in general, and should no more be construed as anti-Jewish, than criticism of British Government policy can be construed as anti-British". It may be crucial to defend the Motion against people seeking to rule it out of court because they claim it is anti-Semitic.

The Synod Motion also commends the document from the combined Palestinian Christian churches, "A Moment of Truth, [Kairos Palestine 2009](#)". Here is an extract from the [English summary](#):

*We know that certain theologians in the West try to attach a biblical legitimacy to the infringement of our rights.*

*We declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights.*

*We condemn all forms of racism, whether religious or ethnic, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and we call on you to condemn it and oppose it in all its manifestations.*

*We call on you to take a position of truth with regards to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land.*

*We see boycott and divestment as non-violent tools for justice, peace and security for all.*

*Our word to the international community is to stop the double-standards, and insist on the international resolutions regarding the Palestinian problem with regard to all parties.*

There was a UK response to this originating from a gathering of Christians on Iona in 2012, the document ["Time for action"](#) by Kairos Britain. The Motion hopes that more Kairos communities will be formed here in Britain.

The Motion urges the UK government and European Union to do all in their power to ensure that human rights are respected and that international law is upheld in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Motion then picks up the call from Kairos Palestine and goes on to urge the UK government and EU to exert through sanctions or other effective means that address the inequality of power between the parties, international pressure on Israel to end the occupation of Palestinian territory and the blockade of Gaza, and allow a just peace to be achieved. In this respect the Synod Motion goes further than the Church of Scotland Report.

Some extracts from the Church of Scotland report:

“These key points should be read in the light of what we already believe:

- That the country of Israel is a recognised State and has the right to exist in peace and security
- That there should be a Palestinian State, recognised by the United Nations, that should have the right to exist in peace and security.
- We reject racism and religious hatred. We condemn anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. We support initiatives to make Scotland, and the Church of Scotland, a place of welcome and hospitality.
- We will always condemn acts of terrorism, violence and intimidation.
- We are committed to dialogue and conversation. We are particularly concerned to make sure that those who are on the margins and whose voices are rarely heard get the opportunity to be listened to. We specifically stand in solidarity with Christians who live in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.” (page 3)

“The Church of Scotland is increasingly disappointed at the current situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. We are especially concerned at the recent actions of the Government of Israel in its support for settlements, for the construction of the security barrier or “the Wall” within Occupied Territory, for the blockade of Gaza and for the anti-Boycott law. We assert our sincere belief that to be critical of the policies of the Israeli Government is a legitimate part of our witness and we strongly reject accusations of anti-Semitic bias. We regularly engage with and critique policies of all Governments, where we deem them to be contrary to our understanding of God’s wish for humanity.” (page 3)

“According to the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel of 14 May 1948, the intention was to create a just society: ‘The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the

country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure the complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations'." (p 7)

"It has to be recognized that the enormity of the Holocaust has often reinforced the belief, at least in certain circles in the West, that Israel is entitled to the land unconditionally. There is guilt among Western Christianity about the centuries of anti-Semitism that led to discrimination against Jewish people, culminating in the total evil of the Holocaust." (p 7)

".....those who remember the reality of apartheid first hand and the consequences of international campaigns on their own nation concur with proposals to consider economic and political measures involving boycotts, disinvestment and sanctions against the state of Israel focused on illegal settlements, as the best way of convincing Israeli politicians and voters that what is happening is wrong. They argue that Christians around the world should not contribute in any way to the viability of illegal settlements." (p 10)

Page 11 of the Report has a List of Conclusions and p 12 gives a list of Actions arising from them.