



A PRAYER FOR PEACE



Uniting Church in Australia
National Assembly

A PRAYER FOR PEACE

1. Why is the Uniting Church Assembly involved in the conflict between Palestine and Israel?

The church always stands for peace between people who are conflicted: “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt 5:9). At the inauguration of the Uniting Church in 1977, the church issued a “Statement to the Nation” which included:

“We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race. We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur.”

The church has sought always to live out those values and has thus been a peacemaking church within Australia and in our international relationships.

Further, the churches of Palestine and the international Christian community, represented primarily in the World Council of Churches, have asked us to be involved.

Palestine and Israel encompass “The Holy Land”, a place of special importance to Jews, Christians and Muslims. People from the three Abrahamic faiths have a special concern for what happens in this part of the world.

2. What outcome is sought by the Assembly?

In accordance with the Uniting Church’s commitment to justice and peace, the Assembly wants to see a peacefully

negotiated resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, with the support of the international community through the United Nations. The cessation of the expansion of the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and an early end to the occupation are crucial steps towards a negotiated resolution. Other crucial steps include the acceptance of Israel’s right to exist by Hamas and a stop to the rockets being fired from Gaza into Israel. The Assembly supports a two-state solution whereby Israel and Palestine can live peacefully side by side, within secure internationally recognised borders.

3. What is the purpose of a boycott of settlements goods?

It shows the seriousness of our views, it’s more than just writing a letter or speaking to a politician. It’s a symbolic act of protest against the ongoing occupation of Palestine, which says to those in authority that we are serious about our concerns. It’s also an act of solidarity with our Christian sisters and brothers in Palestine. The purpose is therefore to add our voice and action to other advocates across the world, and thus to encourage moves towards the resumption of peace talks, the end of the occupation and a negotiated resolution.

4. Why a boycott only of settlements goods and not a wider boycott?

While some voices are calling for wider boycotts against Israel – against all Israeli products, for cultural and sporting boycotts, for disinvestment in Israel – our stance is not against Israel. The Assembly strongly affirms the right of the state of Israel to exist and wants an end to



A PRAYER FOR PEACE

the conflict for the sake of both peoples, Israelis and Palestinians. It's the occupation of Palestine, the illegal settlements and all the accompanying harassments and human rights abuses which need to end. Therefore our invitation to boycott is targeted specifically against the occupation.

5. Does this call for action amount to antisemitism?

No. It is not a call to act against Jewish people. It is a call to support the interests of Jewish people and of Palestinian people, both of whom need an end to the conflict between them. It is a call to be critical of current Israeli government policy and critical of those who support the current Israeli government policy, but this call for action does not in any way involve discrimination or prejudice against the people of Israel or against the Jewish people worldwide.

6. In what way are the Israeli settlements in the West Bank illegal?

The United Nations Security Council has called Israel's settlements a "flagrant violation" of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which forbids population transfer into territory occupied in war (UN SC resolution 465, March 1980). In 2004 the International Court of Justice reaffirmed the illegality of the settlements. Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, such population transfer is also a war crime. Since 1967 the UN has repeatedly called on Israel to comply with international law and dismantle the settlements, but in most years Israel has instead expanded them at an increasing rate.

7. Will this call for action affect the church's relationships with the Jewish community in Australia?

Yes. The majority of the Jewish community in Australia disagrees strongly with the international calls for boycotts against Israel. One important factor in Jewish community opposition to boycotts is that it raises memories of the Nazi boycott in the 1930s of goods produced by Jewish people and therefore raises concern of possible anti-Semitism. But there are Jewish community groups in Australia who support the boycott call, just as there are groups in Israel who support the boycott.

The Assembly has been open with leaders of the Jewish community throughout its considerations of this call to action, including discussions within the Uniting Church-Jewish Community national dialogue and with the leaders of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. Relationships remain respectful and warm, while accepting our different views over the call to boycott settlements goods.

8. What's the nature of the Uniting Church's relationship with Christians in Palestine and Israel?

Through our ecumenical and international links, the Uniting Church has a close relationship with the church in Palestine. Ever since an official visit of the Uniting Church in 1993, relationships have remained close. Our main contacts are through the Jerusalem Inter-Church Center, the Jerusalem Heads of Churches, the Kairos Palestine



A PRAYER FOR PEACE

group and the Middle East Council of Churches. The World Council of Churches provides frequent updates on what is happening in Palestine, and Uniting Church people have participated in the WCC program Ecumenical Accompaniers for Peace in Palestine-Israel. In past years we have had interns in mission working with the MECC in Palestine. National leaders of the Uniting Church participated in the 2007 Australian Church Leaders visit to Palestine and Israel and will do so again in 2012. We are involved in relief and development work in the West Bank and Gaza through the work of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia. Several church leaders from Palestine have visited Australia in recent years to keep us informed on the plight of the people of Palestine.

9. What other international issues is the church involved in at present?

The Uniting Church is much involved in peacemaking efforts and in relief and development work in many parts of the world. Through the Young Ambassadors for Peace program, UnitingWorld is involved in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Ambon, the Philippines, North India, Burma and Sri Lanka. UnitingWorld's relief and development work is prominent across the Pacific, in six countries in Asia and four countries in Africa. Through our ecumenical work the Assembly is also involved in issues like the reunification of Korea, refugees and asylum seekers across the world, the church in China, and worldwide inter-faith relationships.

10. What Australian agencies can provide further information and resources?

There are three organisations in which Uniting Church members are closely involved:

Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network

www.pien.org.au

Act for Peace, National Council of Churches in Australia www.actforpeace.org.au

The Australia Palestine Advocacy Network

www.apan.org.au

