

THE JERUSALEM SABELL DOCUMENT

PRINCIPLES FOR A JUST PEACE IN PALESTINE-ISRAEL

"Seek Peace and Pursue it." (1 Peter 3:11)

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In pursuit of peace and out of our faith commitment, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Jerusalem has formulated a set of principles by which we, as Palestinian Christians, feel a just, secure, and lasting peace can be achieved.

THEOLOGICAL BASIS

Our faith teaches us that,

1. God, creator and redeemer, loves all people equally (John 3:16, Acts 17:24-28).
2. God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security, or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear; and the struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently but non-violently (Jeremiah 9:23-24, Isaiah 32:16-17, Romans 12:17-21).
3. The Holy Land is God's gift to Palestinians and Israelis. They must live justly and mercifully and be good stewards of it (Micah 6:8).
4. "Love your neighbor as yourself" is an inclusive principle that must be honored and sought after (Mark 12:31). The Golden Rule continues to apply, "Do to others what you want them to do to you" (Matthew 7:12).
5. Faithfulness to God obliges us to work for justice, peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing (Matthew 5:9, 43-45).

MORAL BASIS

1. We acknowledge the sufferings and injustices committed against Jews by the West, especially those inflicted in the holocaust. Nevertheless, they do not justify the injustices committed against Palestinians. Justice claimed by one people at the expense of another is not justice.

2. Since Israel has, by force, displaced the Palestinians, destroyed their villages and towns, denied them their basic human rights, and illegally dominated and oppressed them, it is morally bound to admit its injustice against the Palestinians and assume responsibility for it.

3. Since Israel acquired by force 77% of the land of Palestine in 1948, approximately 20% more than the United Nations had allotted, and established its state there, it is moral and right for Israel to return the whole of the areas captured in 1967, i.e. the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem, to the millions of Palestinians who need their own small sovereign state.

4. Israel's 'Law of Return' which allows any Jewish person to immigrate to Israel while denying Palestinians the right of return to their homeland is immoral and discriminatory.

5. Sharing the sovereignty of Jerusalem is imperative to a moral and just peace.

6. The ideology of militarism as well as the stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction are morally wrong. They sabotage the spirit and viability of peace and will not provide security either.

LEGAL BASIS: International Legitimacy

The following principles have been affirmed and repeatedly reaffirmed by the international community:

1. Palestinian refugees have the right of return -- UN General Assembly Resolution 194.
2. The Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are occupied territories and the Israeli forces must withdraw from them -- UN Security Council Resolution 242 and 338 based on the international principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.
3. The Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are illegal. Moreover, it is illegal for the occupying power to transfer its population to, or to change the status of, the occupied territories -- Fourth Geneva Convention.
4. East Jerusalem is occupied territory. Israel's unilateral actions to alter the status of Jerusalem are illegal and invalid -- UN Security Council Resolutions 252 and 478.
5. Violations of human rights such as home demolitions, land confiscation, torture, revocation of residency rights, restriction of movement, closures, and the monopolization of resources are an insult to the dignity of human beings and contravene international law -- United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

THE PRINCIPLES WHICH SABEEL STANDS FOR:

The people of the region--Palestinians and Israelis--both need and deserve a lasting peace, and security. With peace and security in place, bonds of acceptance and friendship can grow. It is no service to either community to promote a peace which flouts international law, ignores justice, and ultimately cannot endure since this will lead to continued bitterness and violence.

The following principles are therefore, based on international legitimacy. The international community has a responsibility to see that they are fulfilled. Once achieved, the strongest

international guarantees must be given to ensure that the people of Palestine and Israel will live in peace and security.

1. Israel must admit that it has committed an injustice against the Palestinian people and must accept responsibility for that. This means that reparation must be paid to all Palestinians who have suffered as a result of the conflict since 1948 whether they are Palestinian citizens of Israel, Palestinians living on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, or Palestinians living in the Diaspora. The road to healing and reconciliation passes through repentance, forgiveness and redress.
2. The Palestinians must have their own sovereign, independent, and democratic state established on the whole of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israel must withdraw to the June 4, 1967 borders. No solution is acceptable if it does not guarantee the Palestinians' and Israelis' right to self-determination, independence, and sovereignty.
3. Jerusalem's sovereignty must be shared by the two states of Palestine and Israel. The city must remain open for Palestinians, Israelis, and all. East Jerusalem can be the capital of Palestine while West Jerusalem can be the capital of Israel. Any agreement must protect the sanctity of the holy places and guarantee the rights of the three religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism on an equal basis. All illegal confiscation of land or expansion of areas by Israel within the walled city of Jerusalem since 1967 must be reversed.
4. The right of return to Palestinian refugees must be guaranteed according to international law. All refugees must be fully compensated.
5. All Israeli Jewish settlements on the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law. All the settlements built on Palestinian soil since 1967 must be part of Palestine.
6. Once the principles of an acceptable justice are applied, a peace treaty must be drawn up between the two states of Palestine and Israel guaranteeing the full sovereignty and territorial integrity of each including recognized borders, water rights, and other resources.
7. Furthermore, both states must fully guarantee the respect and protection of the human rights of all their citizens, including freedom of religion, in accordance with all international conventions.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

In 1948 a grievous injustice was committed by the Zionists (forerunners of the state of Israel) against the Palestinian people. The Zionists acquired by force 77% of the land of Palestine and displaced three quarters of a million Palestinians. Consequently, the state of Israel was declared as a Jewish state. Since then, most of the displaced Palestinians have lived in refugee camps and their national rights have been denied. Despite UN Resolution 194, passed in December 1948 and reaffirmed annually by the UN, Israel has adamantly refused the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homes. The 150,000 Palestinians who remained within that part of Palestine which became the state of Israel were given Israeli citizenship. However, they have been discriminated against and have been treated as second class citizens.

In 1967, the state of Israel acquired by force the rest of the country of Palestine (the 23%) further displacing approximately 325,000 Palestinians. The Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank came under Israeli military rule. The occupation has been oppressive, brutal, and dehumanizing. Palestinian land has been systematically confiscated, human rights violated, and people systemically humiliated, as documented by a number of international, Israeli, and Palestinian human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, B'Tselem, LAW and Al-Haq. Furthermore, Israel assumed control of Palestine's water supply (unfairly restricting water to Palestinians and charging them exorbitant prices), began building exclusively Jewish settlements on Palestinian land and, through hundreds of military laws, persisted in its oppression of the Palestinians. As to East Jerusalem, Israel annexed it and, in 1993, closed it and cut it off from the rest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, thus denying Palestinians the right of access to it. Consequently, even the right to worship in its churches and mosques is obstructed. Moreover, Israel enacted a policy to limit the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem to 27% of the city's population, through demolition of homes, confiscation of land, revocation of Palestinian residency rights as well as other means.

In 1991 at the end of the Gulf War, the peace process was initiated by the United States and Russia. In spite of its initial promise in the Madrid Conference to achieve a just peace, it became, in its Oslo form, an instrument for furthering the injustice. As it evolved, certain portions of the occupied territories were returned by Israel to the Palestinian Authority. By the end of March 2000, only 18.2% of the area of the West Bank has been returned to full Palestinian Authority; 24.7% is under Israeli security and Palestinian civil control. The remaining 57.1% of the West Bank is still under full Israeli control. The areas that have been returned to the Palestinians are not geographically linked together. The Israeli Army controls the highways and major roads throughout the occupied territories, as well as everything below the ground and sky above. It is important to note that in the Gaza Strip, only 60% of the land is under Palestinian control where over a million Palestinians live; while Israel controls the 40% of the Strip for the benefit of 6100 Jewish settlers. Furthermore, some of the 194 Israeli settlements (166 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and 28 in East Jerusalem - - all illegal under international law) have expanded to sizable towns. It is estimated that the number of settlers, including those who live in the settlement ring in and around Jerusalem, is approximately 400,000.

The two sides, Israelis and Palestinians, have more recently been engaged in the final status negotiations which include the thorniest issues, namely, Jerusalem, borders, refugees, water, and settlements.

We feel we are standing at a most important juncture in our history. The United States Government has been working to broker a peace agreement between Israel and Syria as well as to keep alive the negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Many of us are afraid that what might ensue in Palestine is an unjust peace. We at Sabeel feel we have a Christian responsibility to speak our mind for the sake of a lasting peace that will bring an acceptable justice to the Palestinians and security for all the peoples of our region. We fear that the Palestinian Authority might be forced to accept an unjust peace which will be attractively packaged by the state of Israel and the United States Government. We are, however, sure that an unjust peace will only be temporary and will inevitably plunge our region into greater violence and bloodshed. We will not be silent. We lift our voice prophetically in pointing to the pitfalls of

injustice. The following points comprise the different scenarios. We would like to present them clearly with their probable consequences.

THE GREATEST CONCERN: A bantustan state

Taking a good look at the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, it is clear that Israel's eye is focused on the West Bank which includes East Jerusalem. The confiscation of Palestinian land, the building and expansion of the settlements have never stopped. Israel continues to insist that the settlements will remain under Israeli rule. If this is done, Israel will maintain its military presence on the West Bank while allowing the Palestinian Authority to have autonomous rule over its own people. The areas under Palestinian rule will be called Palestine. They will have the semblance of a state but will exist under the suzerainty of Israel and will not enjoy genuine sovereignty. What we are witnessing, therefore, is a bantustan-type state, home rule, just like what was proposed by the former apartheid government of South Africa to its black citizens. From all indications, this is the picture which is emerging on the ground.

If pressured, Israel may even concede the Gaza Strip, where it currently has only 6100 settlers and controls approximately 40% of the land and one third of the water. It might withdraw totally from the Gaza Strip, which now has a damaged aquifer and a serious lack of usable water, and allow the Palestinians to have their sovereign state there. That area will be small and contained in one corner of Palestine and, from Israel's perspective, will, presumably, not pose any serious threat to Israel. On the West Bank, however, the Palestinians will only be given autonomous rule, a homeland, in the guise of a state yet void of actual sovereignty.

This we believe is an unnatural, unhealthy, and unjust scenario and will only lead to a bloodier conflict. History teaches us that oppressed nations will not give up their struggle for freedom and independence. Under this scenario, Israel will not achieve the security it seeks because the forced and unjust peace settlement cannot be permanent.

Sabeel rejects outright this peace formula or any variation of it and warns that its imposition will be ultimately catastrophic for both peoples.

THE GENUINE HOPE:

Two sovereign and fully democratic states

This scenario envisages the total withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied territories including East Jerusalem according to United Nations resolutions 242 and 338. The Palestinians will establish their sovereign state on the whole of the 23% of the land of Palestine. One way to redeem the settlements is to make them the new towns for the returning Palestinian refugees. This can constitute a part of Israel's reparations to the Palestinians. Israel must compensate the owners from whom the land was confiscated. The Jewish settlers who choose to remain in Palestine can become Palestinian citizens and live under Palestinian sovereignty.

As to Jerusalem, it will have to be shared. The city must remain open to all. A peace treaty will be drawn up and the two countries will become inter-dependent economically and will help each other develop their resources for the well being of both their peoples.

This is the formula which the Palestinians have been hoping and working for. Indeed, it is not the ideal solution, but it carries within it an acceptable justice which most Palestinians are willing to

live with for the sake of peace and prosperity. Furthermore, as this scenario agrees with United Nations resolutions since 1967, it will ensure the support of the international community of nations. This formula gives the Palestinians a state as sovereign as Israel, rids them of the Israeli occupation, and restores to them the whole of the occupied territories of 1967. Indeed, a state within the West Bank and Gaza, composed of only 23% of Palestine instead of the 43% allotted by the UN in 1947, is already a very significant compromise by the Palestinians. The Palestinians would have to give up their right to most of historic Palestine. Obviously, Israel, with the help of the United States and the international community, will have to compensate the Palestinian people.

THE VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Our vision involves two sovereign states, Palestine and Israel, who will enter into a confederation or even a federation, possibly with other neighboring countries and where Jerusalem becomes the federal capital. Indeed, the ideal and best solution has always been to envisage ultimately a bi-national state in Palestine-Israel where people are free and equal, living under a constitutional democracy that protects and guarantees all their rights, responsibilities, and duties without racism or discrimination. One state for two nations and three religions.

STANDING FOR JUSTICE

At every turn, the principle of justice must be upheld. Unless justice is rendered and security is achieved, the solution must be rejected because it will not endure. A just solution must include an equal measure of justice and security for both sides to make it viable. Otherwise it will not lead to a permanent peace. This is the basic principle that must be upheld and used as the measure for every one of the above points.

This is where Sabeel takes its stand. We will stand for justice. We can do no other. Justice alone guarantees a peace that will lead to reconciliation and a life of security and prosperity to all the peoples of our land. By standing on the side of justice, we open ourselves to the work of peace; and working for peace makes us children of God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God."

(Matthew 5:9)