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Tutu honors Palestinian Christian group Sabeel by lending his name as its international patron

Nobel Peace Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu has accepted the role of Patron of Sabeel International to assist the Palestinian Christian organization in its outreach and development work with Christian churches around the world. Based in Jerusalem, Sabeel is an ecumenical effort of the Palestinian churches of the Holy Land following the precepts of liberation theology, a worldwide grassroots spiritual movement that interprets the Bible and Christianity from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. The organization has support groups in North America, the UK, Ireland, Scandinavia, and Australia.

“I am honoured to have been asked to be patron of Sabeel,” Tutu wrote in his acceptance letter. The Nobelist has participated in the work of Sabeel over the years, most recently as keynote at a Sabeel conference in Boston in March 2002 speaking on “Occupation is Oppression.” In July he will be keynote for an organizers’ conference of the U.S. Campaign to End the Occupation of which Sabeel is a founding member. Tutu has accused the state of Israel of practicing apartheid against the Palestinians and has said that the U.S. should demand Israel withdraw from Gaza and the West Bank.

James Wall, editor of the Christian Century magazine and an advisory board member of Friends of Sabeel—North America said, “Archbishop Tutu’s courageous leadership in confronting the evil of apartheid in South Africa makes it particularly significant that he has now agreed to be our patron, because the occupation of Palestinians has shown itself to be similar and detrimental to both Israelis and Palestinians just as apartheid was to all South Africans.”

“Tutu’s name brings credibility to the struggle of the Palestinian people,” stated Elizabeth Barlow of Ann Arbor, Michigan, another board member of Friends of Sabeel who has worked for over three decades in efforts to end Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land. Barlow spoke of Tutu’s visit to the occupied territories in 1989 when he publicly called on Israel to end its military occupation. “Israeli journalists asked him questions,” Barlow stated, “but the newspapers took his words and twisted them carefully to avoid the issues he had addressed.”

Tutu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his role as the unifying leader in the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa. In March this year Tutu submitted the final report of his Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a seven-year process of testimonials by almost 20,000 individuals, both the enforcers and victims of South Africa’s apartheid system, resulting in applications for amnesty and financial reparations for victims. The truth and reconciliation model has been duplicated in over a dozen countries and credited as a major contribution to international law. Tutu is widely recognized as a world leader speaking on behalf of the oppressed and promoting non-violent methods of resistance in their struggles for liberation.