

## A response from the Church of Sweden to Kairos Palestine - A Moment of Truth. A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering.

**To  
the authors and signatories of the *Kairos Palestine Document***

Dear Friends in Christ,

Greetings from Church of Sweden in the name of our Risen Lord.

Through the years countless messages have reached us spelling out the grim realities of human suffering experienced by both Palestinians and Israelis living through the long, ongoing conflict about the land.

In the *Kairos document* we have now received a different message from you – our Palestinian sisters and brothers in Christ. It is a cry from the heart of Palestinian suffering, giving voice to an honest and intensive reflection about the meaning of Christian faith in the difficult situation you are experiencing. It is a cry of frustration with the deadlock at the political level. We hear a cry spelling out the reality of Palestinian life under occupation in a situation steadily getting worse.

Despite coming out of the difficult situation in the Holy Land the *Kairos document* is a document about faith, hope and love. It is an expression of a deep continued reflection on what it is to be a Christian in the midst of injustice, harassment, dispossession and occupation.

With this in mind when reading the document we are heartened to find an overall message in line with fundamental Christian concepts about the respect for the God-given value and dignity of all human beings, about love, resistance against evil and about justice, peace and reconciliation.

In the document we find three questions directed to churches all over the world – and thus also to us. The questions are: Why are you so silent? How are you dealing with theology? What can be done to end the ongoing occupation? In short the document is challenging churches all over the world: Do speak up! Deal with theology! Call for an end to the occupation!

### 1. Do speak up!

As a church in Europe we have asked ourselves many times what we could have done in the past, and what we have neglected to do, to contribute to an end to the conflict by the realization of a just peace with freedom and security for both Palestinians and Israelis - Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.

Now we continue to ask ourselves what to say and what to do in a situation when the establishment of a Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, alongside the state of Israel according to the United Nations resolutions seems to be a more and more distant reality.

The *Kairos document* challenges all churches in the world to continuously raise their voices and demand that the conflict be resolved by bringing the occupation to an end through negotiations and by non-violent means.

To keep silent means accepting the situation as it is. The Church of Sweden has a moral responsibility to speak out in support of a peaceful and just solution to this long conflict. Therefore our church, often together with other churches, church-related organisations and the international community, continuously makes statements addressing political decision makers in Sweden and the European Union, as well as in Israel and among the Palestinians, to this effect. This is important for the forming of public opinion in church and society.

For the sake of the future of both Palestinians and Israelis, we will continue to speak up in support of truth, justice and peace, calling for an end of the Israeli occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel in accordance with UN resolutions based on negotiations between the parties. We are in full support of a sovereign state of Israel within internationally recognised borders, as we are in full support of a sovereign Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The ways in which we will bring this principled message across need continuously to be aligned to the realities on the ground in order to effectively contribute to a resolution of the conflict. We believe that the lasting peace we are all longing for, with freedom for Palestinians and security for Israelis, can be realised when the two states exist side by side, respecting each other as neighbours willing to seek reconciliation and build good relations with one another.

## 2. Deal with theology!

Doing theology in the context we find ourselves is fundamental to all Christians and Churches. Thus the theological reflection in the *Kairos Document* originates from a context very different from ours. As such its theology is something we receive with respect and great interest. We would however like to enter into conversation with you on some points in the document:

- a) When it comes to what you refer to as “fundamentalist theological positions” (6.1) we fully agree. These positions – based on different approaches – do exist to a higher or a lesser degree in Western societies offering theological legitimization for occupation and injustices. The Church of Sweden rejects these theological positions and is at present doing research on this issue.
- b) We are challenged by the declaration of the occupation as a sin and an evil against God and humanity (2.5). Naming something a sin – also a structural phenomenon – is to say that it is a matter affecting the relation between God and human beings as well as between human beings themselves. The theological connection to occupation, as something depriving the human being his/her human rights, is crucial. To consider human rights to be God’s gifts to human beings is to imply that human dignity, equality, peace and justice are given to each and everyone, and should therefore be respected and honoured.

A situation where people experience evil forces depriving them of their rights and dignity breeds hopelessness. But your hope against hope, originating in the Christian Gospel and the signs of hope you refer to in the document, is something we note with admiration.

c) In the passage dealing with the universal mission of the land we affirm the importance of the promises in the covenants God made with the peoples of the land. Allow us to quote from the document *Ways of God*, which was approved by our General Synod in 2001:

God is throughout the Bible the God that enters into covenants. The covenant concept is more or less part of God's essential nature – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God's wish for community and unity is expressed already in the covenant with Noah, in which are included and blessed all of mankind and everything that has been created. In the covenant with Abraham, he and the people emanating from him are blessed. In the Sinai covenant, the people of Israel is tied "forever" to God. Jesus Christ enters into a covenant, explicitly open to all peoples and tribes.

It is our understanding that the Sinai covenant with the Jewish people, as well as the covenant in Jesus Christ, are both valid, and manifest God's nature and will and his ultimate love for all people.

d) It is with this in mind the question of the land (paragraph 2.3) should be understood. We agree that this Holy Land – like all land – ultimately belongs to God and that it is holy in as much as God is present in it. The task of all God's people is to be stewards of the land we have been entrusted with, sharing the land with all who live on it in respect of God's love for all people as expressed to us in sacred scripture. To claim that the unquestionable recognition of the validity of the covenant grants God-given rights to groups, peoples or rulers to exclude others from the land is in our understanding not in accordance with scripture. On the contrary; we are all called to "do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8). In this our respect for the rights and dignity of the other – the poor and the stranger – is of special importance as a sign of our commitment to the will of God.

### 3. Call for an end to the occupation!

For several years the Church of Sweden, together with other churches and faith-based organizations in Sweden, have been actively involved in advocacy work for a Just Peace in the Middle East, calling for an end of the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as an end to Palestinian violence against civilians, and for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel.

Some years ago a campaign along these lines was run at national and local levels in Sweden, calling for an end to occupation and sanctions against settlement products<sup>1</sup>. This was also connected to lobbying work in Brussels at the EU level, coordinated with church related development organisations in seven other EU countries.

The lobbying work in Sweden and in Brussels is still continuing to focus on the illegal occupation since 1967, demanding respect for human rights and international law from all parties in the conflict<sup>2</sup>.

We are also actively taking part in the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, administered by the Christian Council in Sweden since its inception in 2003. Currently some 180 Swedes have been part of the programme and they are providing information in Sweden on what

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<sup>1</sup> *För en rättvis fred i Mellanöstern - Häv ockupationen av Palestina. ("For a Just Peace in the Middle East – Stop the Occupation of Palestine")*

<sup>2</sup> *Med vilken rätt? - om Israels ockupation, mänskliga rättigheter och krigets lagar? ("With What Right? – About Israel's Occupation, Human Rights and the Laws of War." Issued in Swedish by the Church of Sweden and Diakonia.)*

they have seen and heard while experiencing what it is to live in the ongoing conflict among both Palestinians and Israelis.

We will continue to protest against any violation of international law and human rights committed by any part in the conflict, such as the settlement policy, the construction of the separation wall on Palestinian land, the investments of companies in the occupied territories and attacks on Israeli civilians.

Our call for sanctions against the Israeli settlements on occupied land will therefore continue, as will our participation in the monitoring of companies operating in the occupied territories.

We will continue our work along these lines as a non-violent way of standing up for a just peace against occupation and attacks on civilians. We do this as we are convinced that the respect for human rights and international law is a fundamental requirement to resolve the conflict and reach a lasting peace to securing the future of both the State of Israel and of a Palestinian state.

Finally we thank you for the document and for its hopeful message that love and mutual trust is possible, as well as peace and definite reconciliation, and that justice and security therefore will be attained for all – Palestinians as well as Israelis (9.1).

Yes, we hope and pray that there will come a time of justice and peace when Palestinians and Israelis will live together side by side in a spirit of reconciliation.

Uppsala, 4 June, 2010

The Commission for International Mission and Diakonia

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