

Educational Resources for Seeking Ways to End Israeli Apartheid

RECOMMENDATION

The San Francisco Presbytery overtures the 226th (2024) General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:

1. Inform members, congregations, presbyteries, and national staff of the following two educational resources that can be used to equip PCUSA members and entities on understanding Israeli apartheid in the broader framework of European colonialism.
 - a. *Why Palestine Matters, The Struggle To End Colonialism*. by the Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church USA.
 - b. *Focus: Palestine*, by the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
2. Urge members, congregations, presbyteries, and national staff, including the Office of Interfaith Relations, to seek appropriate ways to bring an end to Israeli apartheid, including equipping Presbyterians with knowledge of the Israeli laws and policies that constitute apartheid.
3. Direct the Stated Clerk to communicate this action to all PC(USA) agencies, mid-councils, and congregations.

RATIONALE

The PCUSA General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed Israel's right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders in accordance with United Nations resolutions. It has also declared its support for a free, viable, and secure state for the Palestinian people.

From 2004 to 2022 the General Assembly has passed 3 major reports and 20 overtures regarding Israel-Palestine which urged that Israel end its occupation of Palestinian territories and come into full compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by granting full human rights to Palestinians living in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

During that time frame the Palestinians suffered increased oppression and restriction of basic human rights. Today in Israel/Palestine 15 million people live under the control of the Israeli government, but with one set of laws for Jews who comprise half the population and another different set of laws that apply to the Palestinian who comprise the other half of the population.

The 225th (2022) General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognized that Israel's laws, policies, and practices regarding the Palestinian people fulfill the international legal definition of apartheid. Apartheid is legally defined as inhumane acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial or ethnic group of persons over any other group of persons, and then systematically oppressing them to maintain supremacy by having different sets of laws for different groups of people. This overture was passed with the hope it will lead to a peaceful reconciliation for the people of Israel and Palestine like that which occurred in South Africa when apartheid was internationally acknowledged.

The General Assembly also urges members, congregations, presbyteries, and national staff, including the Office of Interfaith Relations, to seek appropriate ways to bring an end to Israeli apartheid.

To that end, this overture informs Presbyterians of two educational resources to assist their understanding of Israeli apartheid in the broader framework of European colonialism and placing Israel/Palestine issues in a global context.

Israel's apartheid laws and actions are not unique; they are part of a 400-year period of colonization when European powers raced to colonize other continents, exploit them for resources, and permanently occupy lands of the indigenous people. In many cases the colonists appropriated culture and stole land and resources resulting in erasure of the indigenous peoples.

By the 1880's, colonialism was seen by many European powers as an acceptable practice as many of them had colonies on other continents. It was in this atmosphere of colonization, land appropriation, and displacement of indigenous people that Zionism was born. A political ideology that grew out of a need for a security, Zionism was created mostly by European Jews advocating for a homeland where Jews would be safe. Reacting to European antisemitism, European Jews were encouraged to colonize the lands of biblical Israel, which had been continuously inhabited by another group of people for millennia.

By the early 1900's, many people in Europe and around the world were questioning the theft within colonialism, the oppression of indigenous peoples, and the moral justification for having one ethnic group dominate another.

The United Nations was formed in 1945 and members declared an end to colonialism as well as the gradual liberation of colonial territories becoming independent nations. At the very time when European powers were ending the age of colonization, the Zionist movement was promoting a new colonial project calling for an in-gathering of world Jewry to settle Palestine and replacing the indigenous Palestinians who lived there by moving out as many Palestinians as possible.

Viewed within the framework of colonialism, the Zionist movement was not unique. However, it took place after the United Nations approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, explicitly stating that forcibly replacing indigenous populations with settlers from another country was against international law.

In May 1948, Israel declared statehood and signed the UN Charter as a member. But it continued its colonization of Palestine through forced evacuations of the resident Palestinians, and expropriation of their land, and the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages.

By 1967, European nations had given up most of their colonies who were asking for independence. In that same year, Israel invaded the West Bank of Palestine and started Jewish-only settlement colonies that now house more than 500,000 people. As the world was leaving colonization behind, Israel was embracing it and creating colonies at a breakneck pace.

By looking at the Israeli system of Apartheid against the Palestinian people through the lens of colonialism, the following two recommended educational resources show how other countries have successfully ended their colonial era and become reconciled with the people they once oppressed or exploited, such as Afrikaners and indigenous blacks in South Africa or New Zealand settlers and indigenous Mauri tribes. They show how systems of apartheid can be dismantled to the benefit of both the oppressed and oppressor.

The overture does not ask the General Assembly to endorse the two educational materials, but to lift them up for study.

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1. *Why Palestine Matters: The Struggle To End Colonialism*

Published by The Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The network is one of over 40 mission networks lodged in the Presbyterian Mission Agency and it has a 2004 General Assembly mandate to advocate for Palestinian rights and to educate Presbyterians on their plight.

Why Palestine Matters, The Struggle to End Colonialism, contextualizes the liberation struggle of the Palestinian people within other global justice struggles. With a foreword by Richard Falk, former UN Special Rapporteur of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories, the book is grounded in international law and brings Palestine into focus through a lens of intersectionality, calling all those who struggle for justice against oppression to consider the challenge of seeing Palestinians in the context of other justice struggles. *Why Palestine Matters* demonstrates that the project of human emancipation is not limited to Palestine, but it also cannot proceed without Palestine.

Why Palestine Matters is a 108-page, full-color publication with visuals on every page, a discussion guide, and maps. A companion website features enhanced resources for study, including video clips and discussion tools. It is available at whypalestinematters.org.

Praise for the book:

“...[This] wake-up call alerts us to the reality that Palestinians are real people who have real human needs and real political legitimacy, who live under an oppressive system of colonial occupying exploitation. This important book summons us to a new awareness that carries with it a mandate to policies and actions that bespeak compassion and embody restorative justice.”

—Walter Brueggemann, Columbia Theological Seminary

2. *Focus: Palestine*

Published by the WCRC, World Communion of Reformed Churches.

The 2017 General Council received a call from the Palestinian Christian community to respond to the continuing crisis in their homeland. Heeding that call, a mandate was issued to collect resources and engage in sharing those with a particular focus on how theologies are used to legitimate the continuing oppression of the Palestinian people.

This resource—*Focus: Palestine*—is the result. It is a comprehensive resource, spanning three parts, an extensive appendix, and linked videos.

All of it may be freely downloaded, reproduced, and distributed for non-profit use with proper attribution.

The book is organized in modular sections that can stand alone, The sections are:

Part 1: Voices and Lenses

Part 2: Theologies, Ideologies, and Resistance

Part 3: Systems of Sin and the Jerusalem Microcosm

This resource includes 13 short video episodes that are designed to accompany different parts of the book. The episodes are:

1. The Occupation Will Survive The Pandemic
2. Meet The Palestinian Christians
3. The Other Side Of The Wall
4. Evils Of Colonialism
5. What Is Your Name?
6. Is Israel A Settler Colonial State?
7. Beyond The Two-state Solution
8. Decolonization Is The Way Out
9. Why BDS? [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions]
10. BDS In A Global Context
11. Culture As Resistance: Sumud
12. Jerusalem Dance Challenge And Palestine
13. Solidarity From Around The World

This educational resource is available at:

<http://wcrch/justice/palestine>