

Presbytery of San Francisco - Resolution on the Israel/Palestinian Hostility: Our Kairos Moment

RESOLVED that, as the Presbytery of San Francisco, we:

1. **Listen** to Dr. King's prophetic witness that "there comes a time when silence is betrayal," realizing that we cannot remain silent to the wanton killing that has taken place in Gaza and the Middle East.
2. **Condemn** unequivocally the attack by Hamas on Israel on Oct 7, 2023.
3. **Condemn** unequivocally the genocide perpetrated by Israel with US support against the Palestinian people.
4. **Recognize** the long term project by Israel to remove Palestinians from the Holy Land parallels our US "settler-colonialist" history, where American settlers similarly gained from dehumanizing our indigenous population.
5. **Call** on the President and US congress to block military sales to Israel in accordance with US laws and the **POSITION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PCUSA**.
6. **Encourage** congregation members and ministers of Word and Sacrament to ask congress to urgently halt weapons sales to Israel.
7. **Express** our commitment to justice and lasting peace for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.
8. **Stand** against all forms of Antisemitism/Anti-Jewish racism and Islamophobia/Anti-Arab racism, condemning both as pernicious forms of evil, dividing and separating us from our interfaith siblings, and stand with those threatened with any harm that inhibits their full participation in the life and liberty of our communities. We affirm that standing up for our values is not Antisemitism.
9. **Encourage** our member congregations to preach and teach on these critical issues.
10. **Publicize**, as Presbytery, this resolution's passage on our webpage, and as practical, in other print or digital formats, and encourage congregations to adopt this resolution, or write and affirm one themselves.

RATIONAL:

1. This is a Kairos moment, a moment of danger and opportunity, a time when we can move forward, boldly proclaiming the Gospel of Christ, the Prince of Peace, or be silent while thousands have suffered and died.

We believe each life is precious. Each life taken, each parent, child, grandchild killed since October 7, 2023, was someone else's entire world. We mourn the Palestinians killed by the Israeli military, officially, more than 50,000 as of this writing, mourn the 1,200 Israelis killed in the attack of October 7.

Considering the staggering loss of life, the ongoing targeting of civilian populations, the harm and trauma inflicted upon women and children, the resurgence of polio and the use of starvation and thirst as weapons of war, we raise our voice against such brutality, the indiscriminate killing of all innocents.

Our government provides offensive weapons used against civilians. Our tax dollars are used to kill and maim women and children, enabling genocide, making us complicit in this atrocity. If "there comes a time when silence is betrayal," then who or what is being betrayed? We betray all who struggle to survive. We also betray our values. Jesus teaches us, "Whatsoever you do to the least of these, you do to me." (Matt 25:40) Can we justify silence in the face of suffering, death and destruction?

2. The crimes against humanity committed by Israel following October 7; making that the start of the “war”, is misleading. October 7th was not the beginning of this conflict, and the attack emerged from a much longer context. The fact that decades of the “peace process” yielded nothing, in no small part due to US policy, helps explain why the attacks took place. Violence might have been prevented had the US and Israel engaged in good-faith, peaceful negotiations. The majority of Palestinians in Gaza are displaced people, mainly from the war of 1948. The atrocity of October 7th, 2023, which resulted in approximately 1200 deaths and over 250 people taken hostage, likely constituting war crimes and should be prosecuted as such. Under international law, Israel has a right to defend itself, but not the right to respond disproportionately or to target civilians.

3. The retaliation by Israel on Gaza has been extraordinarily and disproportionately brutal. Some estimates indicate at least 220,000 Palestinians, including at least 17,000 children have been massacred, 21,000 missing, some 4,000 trapped under the rubble, many vaporized by the latest American-made carpet bomb technology. 1.8 million Palestinians are facing imminent death by starvation. Israel has destroyed 14 times more structures than all conflicts over the past 16 years combined. Every university in Gaza has been obliterated. The devastation to homes, churches, mosques, agriculture, hospitals and infrastructure is incalculable and growing. 1.9 million Gazans have been displaced multiple times. 1,400 Palestinian doctors and nurses, 341 aid workers, and 191 journalists have been killed in the past year; some assassinated, burned alive, bulldozed alive, buried alive, or raped to death in Israeli torture camps.⁽¹⁾ Ambulances are targeted. Israel blocks food and humanitarian supplies. Children are dying of starvation. Corpses which Israel prevents from being retrieved, litter the streets and are consumed by dogs. 95% of Gazan schools have been destroyed. More than 4,000 people have had their upper or lower limbs amputated. Children undergo surgeries and amputations without anesthesia. More than 2,000 people with spinal and brain injuries are bedridden and in urgent need of rehabilitation. At least 50,000 Palestinian children have been orphaned.

Witnesses tell of tear-streaked, panicky children covered in dust, who run in the streets as warplanes and drones roar overhead. Some plead for water, but Israeli soldiers refuse to give them anything, and instead pour water on the ground in front of them. At the checkpoint, Israeli troops separate the men and detain them as their families scream in anguish. Children cling to Israeli tanks desperately attempting to stay with their fathers. As families are forced to walk 10 kilometers south to Gaza City, some of the wounded fall on the road with no hope of getting treatment. “I was walking with my sister in the street,” said Rahaf, 16. She and her sister were the sole survivors in their family of an earlier airstrike that killed 70 people. “Suddenly my sister fell due to the bombing. I saw blood pouring from her, but I couldn’t do anything. I left her in the street, and no one pulled her out. I was screaming, but no one heard me.”

The consensus among international scholars is that Israel has committed genocide or that genocide is imminent. ⁽²⁾ Amnesty International has called this genocide and an ongoing genocide. Human Rights Watch says that Israel’s policy of denying clean water legally amounts to acts of genocide and extermination. This means Israeli authorities have committed the ongoing crime against humanity of extermination under the Genocide Convention of 1948. The government of South Africa instituted proceedings against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) alleging a violation of the Genocide Convention. The ICJ ruled that the allegations have merit, and the threat of genocide is “plausible” and ordered Israel to observe its obligations under the Genocide Convention and to allow basic humanitarian aid into Gaza. Moshe Yaalon, Benjamin Netanyahu’s former Israeli defense minister, says “the current far-right government is determined to

occupy, annex, ethnically cleanse: war crimes are being committed here.” Israel dropped over 85,000 tons of bombs on Gaza in a year, the equivalent to nearly 6 Hiroshima atomic bombs.

In the year following October 7, the Biden administration sent nearly \$23 billion to Israel with no red lines; it vetoed four UN Security Council resolutions demanding a ceasefire; Secretary of State Antony Blinken ignored the U.S. government’s own determination that Israel was blocking humanitarian aid to Gaza when he delivered a statement under oath to Congress last May; the United States has violated its own laws—including the Arms Export Control Act, Section 620i of the Foreign Assistance Act, and National Security Memorandum-20—conditioning U.S. military aid to state belligerents on their compliance with U.S. and international laws of war; the United States has undermined the authority of both the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC); and 107 members of Congress sent a letter to the United Nations two weeks before the election threatening to withdraw U.S. funding and support for the organization if it allowed its members to unseat Israel, as the General Assembly had done with the South African apartheid regime in 1974.

4. We, as mostly white Americans, benefitted and continue to benefit from the settler-colonial project of our forebears. Clearly, we sought to eliminate indigenous populations in order to take the land and use its resources for our benefit. As we continue to struggle with our own complicity in the settler-colonialist projects of the past, and the devastating harm to others, we cannot be blind to the one happening in Palestine. We assess our complicity and refuse to be complicit in ongoing genocide against Palestinians.

5. Veterans for Peace lawyers explain that there are no less than six US laws forbidding the transfer of weapons to any country when it is more likely than not that the arms will be used by that country to commit genocide, crimes against humanity, and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions.

6. Our thoughts and prayers are not enough to offer the people of Palestine. Our faith must become a verb. One way is by communicating with our representatives using the PCUSA Office of Public Witness website: Take Action: Call on the US Congress to Block Sales of Military Aid to Israel.

7. Israel’s citizens and Palestinians deserve security and justice from war and violence. Israel has imposed an apartheid system of injustice on almost every facet of Palestinian life. Most everyone who has traveled to Israel and Palestine, including our Jewish siblings, acknowledge that the occupation is apartheid, systematic ethnic cleansing, and unsustainable colonization. Our own PCUSA denomination recognizes Israel as an apartheid state. Israelis will never have the security they long for until Palestinians receive justice, and the apartheid system is dismantled.

8. We affirm that criticism of Israeli government policy, for instance, the indiscriminate bombing and withholding humanitarian aid from starving people is not antisemitic. Many fear that criticizing Israel may be interpreted as antisemitism and feel safer remaining silent rather than speaking up and risking offense. Conflating antisemitism with criticism of the Israeli nation-state makes it more difficult to identify, and therefore to combat, actual incidents of anti-Jewish bigotry and racism. We reject the “it’s complicated” cliché that keeps us from speaking boldly and wading into controversy. There is nothing complicated about genocide. So, we struggle with a challenge of faith, to speak up for our values and allow some to feel uncomfortable, or stay silent and be complicit in this ongoing humanitarian catastrophe.

If we fail to speak in times of crises like this, then when will we speak? Dr. King prophetically calls us to this moment, “We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time....”

The Holocaust teaches us that genocide can happen as the world watches. We must not let this happen. In Congressman John Lewis' words, "If not now, then when? If not us, then who?"

Pastor Munther Isaac, Christmas Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, in his 2023 Sermon "Christ in the Rubble: A Liturgy of Lament," proclaims: "We are angry...We are broken...Let it be clear: Silence is complicity, and empty calls for peace without a ceasefire and end to occupation, and the shallow words of empathy without direct action - are all under the banner of complicity. So here is my message: Gaza today has become the moral compass of the world. Gaza was hell on earth before October 7th. If you are not appalled by what is happening; if you are not shaken to your core - there is something wrong with your humanity."

9. It is important that we lead with our values: compassion, peace, justice, care for the afflicted, love of our neighbor. If we fail to lead, we fail our young people who long for role models to live out their faith. If we fail to inspire them, they will look elsewhere. If we choose to ignore genocidal harm, we undermine our core values. When we take risks for our faith and proclaim our values in the public square, we boldly proclaim Jesus, the gospel of love, justice, compassion and peace.

10. It is important for congregations to be bold in speaking out so that others will also be encouraged to speak. It will not benefit anyone if the Presbytery adopts this resolution without publicizing it. This is our Kairos moment; may we have the courage to speak out against genocide.

Notes:

(1)

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/israel-opt-horrifying-cases-of-torture-and-degrading-treatment-of-palestinian-detainees-amid-spike-in-arbitrary-arrests/>
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/israels-escalating-use-torture-against-palestinians-custody-preventable>
<https://mondoweiss.net/2024/06/the-genocide-in-israeli-prisons/>
<https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-us-sexual-abuse-palestine-israel-troops-defense-war-human-rights/>
<https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20240806-israel-rights-group-detail-systematic-abuse-of-palestinian-prisoners-in-jails-sdei-teiman>
<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-rights-group-says-palestinian-prisoners-subject-systematic-abuse-2024-08-05/>
<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/israel-palestinians-gaza-held-secret-detention-describe-torture-new-testimonies>
<https://israelpalestinenews.org/shocking-testimony-torture-in-israeli-prisons/>
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/more-human-can-bear-israels-systematic-use-sexual-reproductive-and-other>

(2)

<https://www.bu.edu/articles/2024/is-israel-committing-genocide-in-gaza/>
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/gloom-about-the-day-after-the-gaza-war-pervasive-among-mideast-cholars/>

"I have removed all restraints, (you're allowed) to attack everything." "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed." Yoav Gallant, Israeli Defense Minister, Oct 9 2023

“Right now we’re focused on what causes maximum damage.” Daniel Hagari IDF spokesperson, Oct 10, 2023

“It’s an entire nation out there that is responsible.” Isaac Herzog, Israeli President, Oct 13, 2023

“There is no place for any humanitarian gestures – we must erase the memory of Amalek.” Boaz Bismuth, Member of the Israeli Knesset (Likud Party), Oct 16, 2023

“The only thing that needs to enter Gaza is hundreds of tons of explosives by the Air Force, and not an ounce of humanitarian aid.” Itamar Ben Gvir, Israeli Minister of National Security, Oct 17, 2023

“We are determined to destroy Al-Shifa Hospital.” Ehud Barak, Former Israeli Prime Minister, Oct 20, 2023

“Al-Shifa hospital is now an empty shell with human graves.” Director-General, World Health Organization

“Without hunger and thirst among the Gazan population, we will not succeed...” Revital Gotliv, Member of the Israeli Knesset (Likud Party), Oct 23, 2023

“We are the people of the light, they are the people of darkness.” Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister, Oct 25, 2023

“A ten-year-old boy (in Gaza) is a terrorist in 6 to 7 years.” Nissim Vaturi, Deputy Speaker of Knesset (Likud Party), Nov 13, 2023

“All the preoccupation with whether or not there is internet in Gaza....We are too humane. Burn Gaza now, no less!” Nissim Vaturi, Deputy Speaker of Knesset (Likud Party), Nov 17, 2023

“We need all 2 million to leave. That’s the solution for Gaza.” Ayelet Shaked, Former Israeli Minister of Interior, Nov 22, 2023

“The fighting will continue and expand to any place necessary in the Gaza Strip. There will be no sanctuary cities.” Benny Gantz, War Cabinet Member, Former Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Nov 29, 2023

“There are no uninvolved people in Gaza...everyone is involved.” Rami Igra, Former Head, Mossad Hostages and MIA Unit, Feb 14, 2024

“We must destroy Rafah, Nuseirat, and Deir al-Balah...There’s no half-measure...absolute destruction.” Bezalel Smotrich, Israeli Minister of Finance, Apr 29, 2024

“These people there (in Gaza) deserve death. A hard death, an agonizing death...There are no innocent people there.” Yehuda Shlezinger, Israeli Journalist, Apr 19, 2024

“There is no return to the north of Gaza, and there will not be.” Itzik Cohen, Brigadier General, Israeli Army, Nov 5, 2024

“When a 3-year-old girl is killed in a home in Gaza, it’s because someone in the army decided it wasn’t a big deal for her to be killed.” Israeli Intelligence Officer

“There is total freedom of action...It’s permissible to shoot everyone, a young girl, a woman.” Israeli Soldier

“Never in post-war history had a population been made to go hungry so quickly and so completely as was the case for the 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza.” Michael Fakhri, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

“After encirclement and evacuation of the population, the instructions to IDF need to be clear: The elimination of all energy sources, that is fuel, solar panels and any relevant means (pipes, cables, generators etc.), all food sources including warehouses, water and all relevant means (water pumps etc.), of anyone

who moves in the area and does not exit with a white flag during the days of the effective siege.” Israeli Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee coalition to Defense Minister Israel Katz, Dec 31, 2024

“My fervent dream is simply to stay alive.” Ahmad, 14 year old Palestinian

“Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times.” We therefore call on you to: Publicly repent of previous inaction, silence, and acceptance of theologies that support apartheid, discrimination, and genocide itself, and renounce previous statements to this effect; Name Israeli apartheid and genocide in your relevant statements; Demand that your government immediately and publicly condition further cooperation with Israel on its fulfillment of its obligations under international law; Call on your governments to suspend all arms sales with Israel, impose sanctions and divest from all companies profiting from the illegal occupation and war in Gaza; Boycott Israel—economically, academically and culturally. Call to European Churches: Why are you silent in the face of genocide? From Global Kairos Palestine Justice Coalition and chair, Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah, Dec 19, 2024

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