

THE JERUSALEM SABEL DOCUMENT



PRINCIPLES FOR A JUST PEACE IN PALESTINE-ISRAEL

“Seek Peace and Pursue it” (1Peter 3:11)

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, believe a just, secure, comprehensive and lasting peace can be achieved.

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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 land of Palestine/Israel as the whole world belongs to God. We are all tenants and aliens on it. God has placed us Palestinians and Israelis on the land. We must share it and be good stewards of it (Psalms 24:1; Leviticus 25:23; Ezekiel 47:21-23).
4. The prophetic words of Micah apply to all people. We must all live justly and mercifully and walk humbly before God (Micah 6:8).
5. “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).
6. 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, anti-semitism does not justify the injustices committed against Palestinians. Justice claimed by one people at the expense of another is not justice.
2. Since Israel has caused the displacement of 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 78% of the land of Palestine in 1948, over 24% 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 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 ideologies of militarism as well as the stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction are both morally wrong. They sabotage the spirit and viability of peace, and they will not provide security.

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 the 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, assassinations, revocation of residency rights, restriction of movement, closures, collective punishment 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.
6. The creation of the “*hafrada*” (separation) wall inside the Occupied Territories creates an unjust and illegal system of segregation, land theft and serious obstruction to the life of the local Palestinian population constituting “grave breaches” of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

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.

For a Just Peace:

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. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission must be established to address the past and the future.
2. The Palestinians must have their own sovereign, independent, viable and democratic state established on the whole of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israel must withdraw to the June 4, 1967 borders. Palestinians must have control over their border crossings with Egypt and Jordan. No solution is acceptable if it does not guarantee the Palestinians' and Israelis' right to self-determination, independence, and sovereignty.

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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 access and 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 for Palestinian refugees is enshrined in international law. No solution is possible without coming to terms with this basic issue. It is important for Israel to recognize the legitimacy of that right. The right of return is an individual right and cannot be bargained away. There have been creative proposals to address this issue that will satisfy all sides. Refugees must have the right of choice. Peace cannot be established unless the refugees exercise the right of choice in accordance with international and human rights laws. Palestinian refugees must be compensated adequately for all the injustice and misery they have had to endure for many years.
 5. All Israeli Jewish settlements on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law. All the settlements built on Palestinian soil since 1967 must be part of Palestine.

For an Enduring and Comprehensive Peace:

1. 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, ground and territorial water rights, air space and other resources.

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2. Both states must fully guarantee the respect and protection of the human rights of all their citizens in accordance with all international conventions.
 3. A two state solution provides the minimum basis for a resolution. Our hopes are for a better future for both peoples with a more creative and innovative way of relationship between Israel and Palestine. Some form of confederation between them may be a more suitable solution. The need is for a dynamic political relationship that can transform the cumulative enmity and channel it to a positive force.
 4. An educational program for peace must be implemented in both Israel and Palestine in order to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence.
 5. One of the greatest threats in our area is that of religious extremism. Both states need to move towards a separation of religion from state within a democratic system of government. Religious freedom including respect, understanding and acceptance among people of different faith backgrounds must be promoted within the educational system of both states as well as programs for a non-racial and non-sexist society.
 6. The Palestinians and all of the Arab states must recognize and accept the state of Israel within the 1967 borders. This could be done through “the Saudi Plan” outlined by the Arab League (which granted Israel full recognition by all Arab states at the realization of the complete and total withdrawal from all occupied territories.)
 7. Only the Palestinians can provide Israel with the security it needs. A total end to the occupation and full mutual recognition between Israel and Palestine must bring to an end all acts of aggression and violence on both sides.
 8. Israel must recognize and accept the state of Palestine within the whole of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem as a sovereign state and refrain from encroaching on it in any way.

Other neighboring states' internationally recognized borders must also be honored including those of Syria and Lebanon.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

In 1948 a grievous injustice was committed by the Zionist forces (forerunners of the state of Israel) against the Palestinian people. The Zionists acquired, by force, 78% 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 22%) 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 the 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 temporarily returned by Israel to the Palestinian Authority. The areas that were returned to the Palestinians were not geographically linked together. The Israeli Army continued to control 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, Israel confiscated 40% of the land for the benefit of 7500 Jewish settlers leaving only 60% available for over a million and a half Palestinians. Furthermore, some of the approximately 300 Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem 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 almost half a million.

In the summer of 2000, President Bill Clinton convened a summit meeting at Camp David with President Arafat and Prime Minister

Barak. The summit failed due to disagreements on the final status of Jerusalem including the sovereignty rights to the Haram area - the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque - and more critically the deceptive offer of Israel for 95% of the West Bank and Gaza that left key settlement blocks in place and denied territorial contiguity. In September 2000, after the failure of the Camp David negotiations, Ariel Sharon, then Minister of Defense, made a provocative visit to the Haram al Sharif area guarded by a large contingent of soldiers. It inflamed Palestinian emotions who rose up to its defense sparking the second intifada. The escalation of the intifada continued with greater military force on the part of Israel and increased resistance - armed and non-armed - on the part of the Palestinians.

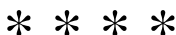
By March of 2002, in the wake of a deteriorating situation between Israel and the Palestinians and the deaths of over a thousand Palestinians and over three hundred Israelis, the Arab League unanimously endorsed a Saudi government proposal for a complete and total recognition of Israel by all Arab countries in exchange for a complete end to the occupation and recognition of the right of return. This Saudi Plan was heralded around the world as a real step towards comprehensive peace but was immediately dismissed by Israel.

Under Sharon as Prime Minister, in the same month, Israel began a massive incursion and re-occupation of those sections of Palestinian territory in the West Bank under Palestinian Authority control in the military operation "Defensive Shield." Sharon justified the operation as a response to the suicide bombing that took place in Netanya at a hotel on the eve of Passover. As the incursion continued and the body count escalated, international pressure around the world increased for Israel to stop the violence. However the tighter closures and restrictions on Palestinian civilians continued throughout the year.

In March of 2003, the U.S., Europe, Russia and the United Nations as “the Quartet” announced a comprehensive plan called the “Road Map” based on international law to resolve the conflict. It referenced the Saudi Plan as well as UN resolutions 242 and 338. The Palestinian Authority accepted the plan as it stood and the Israeli government, while submitting fourteen reservations, also accepted it. Although the Road Map was accepted, its implementation never even achieved the first provisions due to lack of international enforcement.

At the same time as efforts were being made to meet the conditions of the Road Map, Israel made the decision to unilaterally build what it called a “separation fence.” Built almost exclusively inside the West Bank, often cutting deep into Palestinian territory in order to bring settlements geographically “into” Israel, the wall made a mockery of the bilateral nature of the Road Map. By February 2004, due to deep international concern, the U.N. General Assembly asked the International Court of Justice at the Hague to hold hearings on its legality. In the same week, Sharon announced a unilateral disengagement plan to withdraw from Gaza and four settlements on the West Bank in exchange for the U.S. to endorse a plan to annex portions of the West Bank.

There are many questions that remain: What will happen when the wall is completed? How is this separation wall going to continue to affect Palestinian life? What will be America’s role - especially after the American election? What is the Quartet’s role? As things change in Iraq, what effect will it have on the Palestine/Israel conflict? How does the Road Map get back on track? We know that the political realities may shift, but we hold that the principles outlined above will remain the basis for a just peace.



We at Sabeel 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 are 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 Palestinians to have autonomous rule. 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," worse than 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.

Sharon is proposing a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Will he announce that the occupation is over and that Palestinians have their "sovereign state" there? That area will be small and contained in one corner of historic Palestine and, from Israel's perspective, will, presumably, not pose any serious threat to Israel. 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 a travesty 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 22% of the land of historic Palestine. One way to redeem the settlements is to make them the new towns for the returning Palestinian refugees who choose to live there. 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 for 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 mutually 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 22% 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)





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