Regional Council Pledge to Become an Apartheid Free Community

Origin: Tri-regional PalNet and Commissions of Discipleship and Justice

1. **What is the issue? Why is it important?**

The regional council has the opportunity, as a collective of United Churches, to respond to one of the most significant moral challenges to the world of our day: the ethnic cleansing of and attempt to erase the people of Palestine. We believe in Jesus who calls us to seek justice and resist evil. The ecumenical body of Palestinian Christians, Kairos Palestine, calls churches of the world to listen to their voices and join them in resisting the apartheid nature of Israel's occupation and the on-going taking of land which may cause the extinction of the "living stones", the presence of Christians in the Holy Land. As the United Church of Canada does gospel work in opposing racism, in valuing human rights for all persons, in resisting apartheid, in valuing the voices of Palestinian Christians who are members of our church as well as those who call to us from Palestine, our commitment to God's work of justice-making calls us to join others in this resistance to oppression.

2. **What is happening now?**

The Palestinian people live under a settler-colonialist project of the state of Israel where land is being taken by the war on Gaza, as well as in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, by the occupation which is deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion "LEGAL CONSEQUENCES ARISING FROM THE POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF ISRAEL IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY, INCLUDING EAST JERUSALEM" July 19, 2024. Palestinians are subject to discrimination based on race (being non-Jewish) to the degree that Israel is found to have created an apartheid system. Farmers and herders are being forced from their land while olive trees are uprooted by bulldozers and crops are sprayed with chemicals that destroy them. Families are forced to wait in long lines at checkpoints and other barriers, even when seeking emergency medical care. Not only adults but children are arrested and detained without trial for months and years in violation of basic human rights. Christian communities such as Taybeh are being persecuted by settlers with the knowledge and support of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF).

3. **What is the recommendation?**

1. That Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council become an Apartheid Free Community with the following pledge:

"WE AFFIRM our commitment to freedom, justice, and equality for the Palestinian people

and all people;

WE OPPOSE all forms of racism, bigotry, discrimination, and oppression; and

WE DECLARE ourselves an Apartheid-free community and to that end,

WE PLEDGE to join others in working to end all support to Israel's Apartheid regime,

settler colonialism, and military occupation."

2. that Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council authorize the Executive Minister to sign the Apartheid-free Communities pledge by registering the region council on the Apartheid-free Communities webpage

3. That the regional council, through the Commission of Discipleship and Justice and Tri-regional PalNet, encourage communities of faith to learn about and become Apartheid-Free Communities.

4. **Background information:**

Since the creation of the state of Israel and the Nakba (1947-48) people of The United Church of Canada have been concerned about the displacement of Palestinians from their villages and land. A current expression of ecumenical and broader societal action is the Apartheid Free Communities, a movement that began in North America as an initiative of the Society of Friends (Quakers) and continues to grow with religious communities, businesses, non-governmental organizations and even towns and cities taking the pledge. Pacific Mountain, Bermuda-Nova Scotia and Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Councils voted to join the movement. In 2012 The United Church of Canada adopted a policy of economic measures called "Unsettling Goods" encouraging members of the UCC to avoid buying items produced in illegal settlements (the Canadian government, in August 2026, undertook a similar position). In October 2024, following GC44 affirmation of the Justice Principles for advocacy work, the Moderator of the United Church of Canada wrote a pastoral letter encouraging participation in strategies including: the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement; the Apartheid-Free Communities movement; and the international human rights community in recognizing and rejecting Israel's apartheid system of laws and legal procedures towards the Palestinian people. Ecclesiastically, we partner with Kairos Palestine and other Palestinian faith organizations and are committed to listening to their experience of oppression and holding them in both prayer and action. Today, it is faithful that we join with the Christians of Palestine and people of good will in the world to end apartheid in Israel/ Palestine just as the United Church joined with other Christians in the work of ending apartheid in South Africa.

5. **How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitments on equity?**

Apartheid can only exist where there is racial discrimination which is a deep concern of the United Church of Canada as we strive to be an anti-racist church. Our policy is also to avoid discrimination on the basis of any identity. In this case Israel has declared itself a Jewish state and discriminates on that basis against those who are Christian, Muslim or other. It is vital that we distinguish between Judaism, a religion, and Zionism which is a political ideology. The United Church General Council 45 declined the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of Antisemitism and instead chose the Jerusalem Declaration, making clear that criticism of Israel, a state like others, is not antisemitic, a form of racism.