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Israel/Palestine Statement

The Iona Community has a strong and long-standing commitment, through prayer, protest and the active engagement of many members, to seeking peace and justice in Israel/Palestine. We believe that a just peace for Israelis and Palestinians is only possible through ending the 'settler colonial' project of the state of Israel and the establishment throughout historic Palestine of equal rights, irrespective of religious and ethnic background and identity.

We fully endorse the 2009 Kairos Palestine document A Moment of Truth, the call of Palestinian Christians, asking all churches and Christians in the world 'to revisit theologies that justify crimes perpetrated against our people and the dispossession of the land'. We accept the Kairos challenge to Christian interpretations of the Bible that justify the oppression of Palestinians; this requires naming the sins of oppression, occupation and control. We embrace Kairos Palestine's challenge to support Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, reflecting Palestinian Christian calls to non-violent resistance to Israeli oppression.

We reaffirm the 2012 Iona Call: 'We are called to respond boldly to the deepening suffering of our sisters and brothers in Palestine under occupation by Israel. We stand in faithfulness and solidarity with Palestinians and Israelis who are working tirelessly for a peace based on justice.' Furthermore, we echo the 2015 Kairos Britain document Time for Action: 'We can be silent no longer. It is time for prophetic faithfulness. It is time for action.'

We acknowledge the need to scrutinise Christian theology and repent of any legitimacy it may give to anti-Semitism. We believe any theology which justifies oppression is incompatible with a belief in a God of love and justice. We oppose any theology which privileges one religion or belief system and discriminates against adherents of others, or provides theological justification for the exclusive right of any group of people to the land. We condemn Christian Zionism in particular as a distortion of the Christian faith, in its abuse of scripture to oppress Palestinian people. In the centenary year of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, we acknowledge the legacy of Britain's role in the current conditions of Israel-Palestine, and urge an apology from Britain for its part in the dispossession of Palestinian land and the wider Middle East conflict.

Successive, fruitless peace processes have allowed Israel to stall for time as it seeks to complete the takeover of Palestinian land and the forced removal of its inhabitants through its continuing colonial policy of building and expanding settlements. The efforts of international bodies have proved ineffective in resisting Israel's actions, and further pressure is now needed worldwide from all who are concerned: we believe the time to act is now.

We support the demands of the BDS movement that Israel should abide by international law and United Nations resolutions by:

- ending the military occupation of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the siege of Gaza;
- abolishing all laws which discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel; and
- granting all Palestinian refugees the right to return.

BDS recognises the human rights of all Palestinians suffering from Israeli oppression, in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and beyond. BDS is an act of non-violent solidarity, pursuing equality, freedom and justice. It is consistent with the spirituality and values of the Iona Community, as we act in obedience to Jesus' teaching to love our enemies whilst resisting evil. We note the role BDS played in ending South African apartheid, a struggle that also involved many Iona Community members, and we seek to learn from that.

We applaud the courageous non-violent resistance to the occupation practised by Palestinians and members of the Israeli peace movements who support them, and we repudiate entirely the use of violence wherever this is evident. We also congratulate the sections of international civil society, including faith communities, which have acted in solidarity with the Palestinians by endorsing and practising BDS.

We urge our members, and the churches to which we belong, to commit faithfully to this non-violent discipline in the hope, through persuasion and pressure, of bringing about a just and peaceful solution. We recognise that this may bring difficulties: in relations with some of our Jewish and Christian friends, and in the way we practise our faith in territory that is under Israeli rule. It may also result in false accusations, including unfounded claims of anti-Semitism, which are made against those who speak truth to power. However, we believe that we are called to costly discipleship, to the discipline of faithfulness to God using our own vulnerability, both collectively and individually, as a witness to God's justice and love.

The Iona Community is an ecumenical Christian movement seeking new ways of living the gospel in today's world through working for peace and social justice rebuilding community and in the renewal of worship.

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