

MIDDLE EAST

<https://presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/human-rights/human-rights-in-the-middle-east/>

Principles endorsed by General Assembly

- The Presbyterian Church in Canada supports deep-level solutions of Middle East problems which take full account of the needs and rights of all the peoples and nations involved, with particular reference to the plight of Palestinian refugees. (A&P 1967, pp. 70–71, 103)
- The beginning of a path to peace in the Middle East and specifically between Israel and Palestine lies in a process of mutual recognition whereby the Government of Israel recognizes that the long-bereft Palestinian people have rights to territory and freedom, while at the same time the Palestinians recognize the legitimacy of the state of Israel and forswear violence and threats of violence against it. (A&P 1983, p. 374, 79)
- The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirms the policy approved by the Steering Committee of KAIROS in 2008 opposing a general boycott of Israeli products and of sanctions against Israel while reflecting on more specific (rather than general) means of economic advocacy as a non-violent means of promoting peace with justice. (A&P 2008, p. 271–81, 18)
- Acknowledging the complexity of issues faced by the people of the Middle East and, in particular, by the people of Israel and the Palestinian territories, General Assembly affirms the right of the State of Israel and the people of Palestine to exist in peace and security while rejecting Christian Zionism as a doctrinal stance inconsistent with Reformed doctrine and its emphasis on one covenant of grace for all peoples. The General Assembly also acknowledges the message of Palestinian sisters and brothers in Christ that Christian Zionism poses a significant obstacle to a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians. (A&P 2012, p. 289–92, 35)

Select actions of the church

2023: General Assembly adopted a recommendation that a delegation comprised of the Moderator and other Presbyterians to visit partners in Palestine/Israel be arranged as soon as possible in the spirit of the “A Moment of Truth” invitation (issued 14 years ago by a group of Palestinian Christian leaders representing a wide spectrum of churches and church-related organizations in Palestine and Israel) “to come and see” the struggle of the Palestinian people living within Israel and in the occupied territories, and to report back to a future General Assembly.

General Assembly agreed to invite a member of the leadership team of Independent Jewish Voices and/or Canadian Voices for Peace (an offshoot of the Israeli group, Voices for Peace) to address the 2024 General Assembly.

General Assembly encouraged congregations and individuals to write to their Member of Parliament to request a meeting to listen and to respond to the specific ways the Government of Canada intends to protect international human rights for the Palestinian people. (A&P 2023, p. 22, 105–09)

2022: Congregations were encouraged to write personal letters to members of the Government of Canada about the State of Israel’s occupation of Palestine, encouraging them to speak up for rights such as food security for Palestinians and support Palestinian farmers and olive tree planting through the [Olive Tree Project](#). (A&P 2022, p. 144–45, 45)

2021: General Assembly encouraged congregations to study resources from Palestinian and Israeli human rights to learn more about the situation in Palestine and Israel, to invite speakers with experience of working for a just peace to speak to their congregation; and, once pandemic travel restrictions are eased, to plan a “Come and See” visit to the Palestinian Territories using a Palestinian Tour company. Reference materials for these recommendations may be found in the report of the International Affairs Committee online [here](#). (A&P 2021, pp. 329–60)

General Assembly adopted recommendations that the Moderator write to the Government of Canada encouraging that Canada pressure Israel to adhere to international law related to annexation of the occupied territories and the right of return of the Palestinian people and convey dismay regarding the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and other areas of the Palestinian Territories, and that the Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations be given authority to take stronger action in support of recommendations on Palestine. (A&P 2021, pp. 329–60)

2019: General Assembly endorsed the “No Way To Treat A Child” campaign and wrote to the Canadian government requesting that Canada condemn mistreatment of Palestinian children brought into the Israeli military court system and that Canada challenge the government of Israel to fulfill its promises as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and requesting that it appoint a Special Envoy to promote, monitor and report on the human rights situation of Palestinian children living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: specifically

undertaking an evaluative analysis of Israeli military law and practice as they affect Palestinian children in the West Bank by reference to the standards of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other applicable international law. Lastly, the Moderator wrote the Government of Canada requesting that Global Affairs Canada officials in Ramallah and Tel Aviv develop links with Defense for Children International – Palestine and attend military court sessions involving children. (A&P 2019, p. 29–30; 276–79) Context note: the “No Way To Treat A Child” campaign, launched in 2013, is an international movement advocating for the rights of Palestinian children and seeks that as a minimum safeguard for these children, Israeli authorities must respect and ensure basic due process rights and an absolute prohibition against torture and ill-treatment.

2018: General Assembly encouraged the Government of Canada to exclude products made in the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, in contravention of international law, from the benefits of the Canada Israel Free Trade Agreement. (A&P 2018, pp. 288–92, 22)

2017: General Assembly, through a letter from the moderator, wrote to the Prime Minister of Israel encouraging the Government of Israel to meet its obligations under international conventions and Israel’s laws to protect the civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of its Palestinian citizens and to address racial discrimination. (A&P 2017, p. 20, 298–301)

2015: General Assembly recommended that congregations pray for all people being persecuted and for their persecutors, that they have a change of heart; and pray for an end to violence in Syria. (A&P 2015, p. 294–309, 26)

2013: General Assembly wrote to the Canadian government inquiring what measures Canada takes to persuade Israel to lift restrictions that it may place on the movement of people and goods that hamper economic development in the West Bank and inquiring if the Canadian government is willing to request that Israel renegotiate relevant sections of the Canada Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA) so that goods include a certificate of origin and that goods from the settlements are excluded from beneficial tariff treatment under the CIFTA (This would not exclude goods produced in the Jewish settlements in the West Bank from entering the Canadian market).

General Assembly wrote to General Electric and Caterpillar requesting information on their respective policies to ensure their products are not used in situations where human rights are violated. (A&P 2013, p. 278–86, 22, 24) Context note: General Electric and Caterpillar produced products that were sold to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and which had allegedly been used by the IDF in actions that violated human rights of Palestinian citizens.

General Assembly wrote to the Canada Revenue Agency asking if its policies permit Canadian charities to issue tax receipts for donations that support projects in the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. (A&P 2013, p. 278–86, 22, 24)

2011: General Assembly approved the response of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to the document “KAIROS Palestine: a moment of truth – faith, hope, and love – a confession of faith and call to action from Palestinian Christians.” General Assembly recommended that: courts of the church study the KAIROS Palestine Document and supporting documents and to deepen their understanding of the situation; that the church encourage the Government of Canada to use its offices to seek ways to end the occupation and to establish a just and lasting peace in Israel-Palestine according to United Nations resolutions. The Moderator visited Palestine and Israel in response to the invitation from Palestinian Christians to “come and see.” (A&P 2011, p. 268–71, 31, 34)

2009: General Assembly wrote to General Electric (in which the church holds shares) to inquire about the use of the Apache helicopters in the Occupied Territories, and to express concern about the apparent use of the Apache helicopters in attacks in densely populated civilian areas in Gaza on January 7, 2009, as reported to B’Tselem: The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. (A&P 2009, p. 288–99, 18)

2008: General Assembly advocated that the Government of Canada play a more active role in promoting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The work of the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel was reaffirmed and highlighted as an opportunity for individuals wishing to deepen their understanding of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

Presbyterians were encouraged to promote the purchase and distribution of products and services from the Occupied Palestinian Territories through organizations such as the Zatoun organization, Holy Land Handicraft Co-operative

Society, Holy Land Artisans, and the Alternative Tourism Group from Ramallah, both to assist the Palestinian people, and as a means of promoting awareness of the situation of Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories.

General Assembly wrote to the Government of Canada requesting information on steps that have been taken to stimulate trade between Canada and territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority (the West Bank and East Jerusalem) and urging the Government of Canada to: 1) introduce a certification of origin to ensure that products produced in territories occupied by Israel since 1967 are excluded from the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA); and 2) ensure that neither Israeli nor any Canadian policy impedes trade relationships between Canada and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Congregations and individuals visiting the Holy Land were encouraged to consider taking tours sponsored by the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre in Jerusalem, Holy Land Living Stones Pilgrimage (The Holy Land and Christian Ecumenical Foundation), or The Society for Biblical Studies as an opportunity for reflection and study, and to visit with partners in Israel and Palestine.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada recognized the State of Israel's 60th anniversary and its attempts to foster democracy in the Middle East, while recognizing with contrition the Church universal's long history of anti-Semitism and seeking greater understanding in the future. (A&P 2008, p. 271–81, 18)

2002: General Assembly affirmed its support of the Canadian government's efforts to participate in negotiations for a just and lasting peace settlement in the Middle East. General Assembly advocated that the Government of Canada, as a member of the UN, speak against the application of sanctions, to seek a political solution towards the current Iraqi regime, and to voice opposition to a strategy of offensive military action against Iraq. (A&P 2002, p. 279–81, 16-17) Context Note: Military action was feared in light of a) the inclusion of Iraq in a 3-nation "axis of evil" in the January 2002 State of the Union address by President George W. Bush to the US Congress, b) statements of concern about Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction by President Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in March 2002, and c) several references by top US officials and advisors on the necessity of regime change in Iraq. These fears were realized when the US and UK launched an invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003. Baghdad was secured April 9, 2003 and Saddam Hussein captured December 14, 2003. An Iraqi-led Governing Council was established in July 2003 and current plans are to turn over full authority to an Iraqi government June 30, 2004.

1993: General Assembly asked the Canadian government to press for the lifting of non-military sanctions against Iraq. (A&P 1993, p. 252–53, 38)

1991: General Assembly commended a study by the Canadian Council of Churches on the Middle East to Presbyterians as a means of raising awareness about the churches in the Middle East and the critical issues faced in the region, adopted a statement on peace in the Middle East, and re-affirmed support for an international peace conference for the Middle East. General Assembly asked the Government of Canada implement steps to limit arms sales to the Middle East. (A&P 1991, p. 301–04, 308, 56–57)

1990: General Assembly endorsed a position paper on the Middle East drafted by the Canadian Council of Churches and commended it to congregations. The paper affirms the need for interfaith dialogue between Christians, Jews and Muslims, and comments on a role for the church in seeking to build understanding, dialogue and peace-building initiatives.

General Assembly re-affirmed the need for a comprehensive settlement recognizing the needs of both Israelis and Palestinians, based on UN Security council resolutions and gave strong support to UN sponsored peace conference, asking the Government of Canada to do likewise. Messages of support were sent to the Near East Council of Churches. Presbyterians traveling to the Middle East were encouraged to contact the travel service of the MECC and take the time and opportunity to meet with Arab Christians. (A&P 1990, p. 395–400, 62–63)

1989: General Assembly re-affirmed, and communicated this to the Government of Canada, the need for a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the UN Security Council resolutions to be negotiated through a UN sponsored peace conference. General Assembly asked congregations and presbyteries to support and facilitate efforts to build greater awareness among the churches, dialogue between Jewish and Arab communities in Canada, and dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims, both locally and nationally. (A&P 1989, p. 367–69, 63)

1988: General Assembly urged the Government of Canada to call for an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations with reference to the right of the Palestinians for a national homeland. (A&P 1988, p. 366–67, 51)

1987: General Assembly called on Canadian Presbyterians traveling to Israel to be aware of the political significance of the travel arrangements they made, of the people and places they visited and urged them to make a point of attending church and visiting Christian institutions while in Israel. (A&P 1987, p. 340–41, 33)

1983: General Assembly called for the withdrawal of all outside military forces from Lebanon and the pursuit of peace in the Middle East through acceptance of Israel’s right to security and recognized boundaries and the Palestinians’ right to a homeland within a clearly defined territory. (A&P 1983, p. 374, 79)

1978: General Assembly encouraged the Canadian government to take a strong position in any Middle East peace negotiations “having regard to ... justice for Palestinians and security for Israel.” (A&P 1978, pp. 335, 36)

1972: In the wake of a massacre of 15 Christian pilgrims and 9 Israeli civilians in Tel Aviv, General Assembly mandated the church’s International Affairs Committee to communicate with the governments of Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Israel concerning maintaining safe passage for pilgrims of all faiths. (A&P 1972, pp. 61-62)

1967: General Assembly adopted a statement on the Middle East, encouraging the Government of Canada to seek that the United Nations establish a peace-keeping force adequate and appropriate for restoring and supervising conditions for a just settlement and seek solutions that take full account of the needs of all peoples and nations involved, with particular reference to the plight of Palestinian refugees. (A&P 1967, p. 70–71, 103)

Recent action taken by The Presbyterian Church in Canada since October 7, 2023.

Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage: Canadian Churches for Just Peace

Join us today and in the weeks to come in the [Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage: Canadian Churches for Just Peace!](#) Thousands of Canadian Christians have already, [throughout Lent, walked, rolled, and prayed together](#) for an enduring and sustained ceasefire between Israel and Hamas; an immediate flow of life-saving food, water, aid, fuel and humanitarian assistance into Gaza; the release of all captives; and the end of occupation so a just-peace can begin.

This global ecumenical movement of prayerful solidarity with the people of Gaza and with Palestinian and Israeli partners on the road to justice and peace continues. In your local communities, participate in the Pilgrimage by organizing/attending events, walking, praying, and letting others know. Learn more and share your events, experiences and photos with KAIROS Canada, lead organizer (<https://www.kairoscanada.org/gaza-ceasefire-pilgrimage>).

You are also invited to join us in Ottawa on Parliament Hill on May 22nd if you are able.

Easter Reflection: “Be Agents of Peace, Justice and Reconciliation”

Three months ago, it was dark in Bethlehem at Christmas, and the city was in darkness and fear. The angels’ song, “Peace on earth, goodwill to all people,” was hard to fathom amid the violence.

This is Holy Week, and our attention shifts from Bethlehem and its surrounding hills to Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, and the place called Golgotha. And the violence continues. For centuries, pilgrims have come to Jerusalem to mark the events of Holy Week, wave palm branches, pray at Gethsemane, lament on the Mount of Olives, and trace Jesus’s steps along the stations of the cross. This year, Palestinian Christians from the West Bank were prevented by Israeli authorities from entering the occupied city of Jerusalem to participate in Palm Sunday devotions. Christian Palestinians are required to obtain special permits to pass through military checkpoints surrounding Jerusalem and go to places of worship, especially the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Prayer and Advocacy

Wear white, symbolizing peace.

Participate in the [Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage initiative](#) .

Affirm the eight core convictions of the [Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimage](#)

Donate to [Gaza Relief through PWS&D](#)

Saturday, March 30, 2024 – Land Day (Palestine): encourage people to plant a tree in memory of all the Palestinian and Israeli children who have died in the violence. You can also donate to [the Olive Tree campaign](#).

[Kairos Palestine Easter Message by His Beatitude, the \(Latin\) Patriarch of Jerusalem Emeritus, Michel Sabbah.](#)

In the Kairos Palestine Easter Message, His Beatitude, the (Latin) Patriarch of Jerusalem Emeritus, Michel Sabbah, writes, “Pray with us and work and be agents of peace, justice and reconciliation in this holy land.”

Patriarch Michel Sabbah and Rifat Kassis, Secretary General of Kairos Palestine, offer this prayer:

*O God, in this time of darkness and despair, we lift our hearts to You in prayer.
We pray for an end to the war and bloodshed in Gaza, and we ask for Your mercy to spare the lives of innocent civilians caught in this genocide war.*

Grant wisdom to world leaders and decision-makers to seek peaceful resolutions and to prioritize the safety, well-being, and dignity of all people. Comfort those who mourn the loss of loved ones and strengthen those who are working tirelessly for justice and those who work for providing humanitarian assistance to the people in need.

We entrust the lives of the people of Gaza into Your loving hands, trusting in Your grace and mercy to bring an end to their suffering in a new era of peace, justice, equality, free of occupation, oppression and dispossession.

Visit <https://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/resources/alerts/kairos-palestine-easter-alert-2024> to read the Kairos Palestine Easter Appeal 2024. The Appeal includes updates on the situation in Gaza and a meditation by Latin Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah.



Graffiti in Bethlehem. Credit: PCC

Amid war, the [Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem have called](#) “upon our congregations to stand strong with those facing such afflictions, by this year foregoing any unnecessarily festive activities.” The statement notes that while, under normal circumstances, displays of light would mark the birth of Christ, this year is marked with the loss of thousands of lives, including women and children, with many grieving “the loss of their homes, their loved ones, or the uncertain fate of those dear to them.” The statement also invites “the faithful to advocate, pray, and contribute generously as they are able for the relief of the victims of this war and for those in dire need, as well as to encourage others to join them in this mission of mercy”. This call and others have resulted in the cancellation of all public festivities and decorations to mark the season. [Read more](#)

Amidst the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, Palestinian farmers residing in the West Bank are gearing up for their olive tree planting season. The fields have been prepared for the orchards since before October of this year. The Joint Advocacy Initiative (initiated by our local partners, the East Jerusalem YWCA/YMCA), which oversees the campaign, has confirmed that the planting will proceed despite security concerns. However, the number of trees planted will be reduced to 15,000. The farmers will handle the planting themselves. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has sponsored the planting of 261 trees in Bethlehem and Hebron between 2022 and 2023. The PCC is accepting donations for the Olive Tree Campaign and you can contribute to this campaign, which will help Palestinian farmers to replant their destroyed olive orchards.

[Plant an Olive Tree](#)

Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) is planning humanitarian assistance that will be provided through members of the ACT Alliance. PWS&D's [humanitarian response](#) will assist with shelter, food, livelihoods, emergency health, psychosocial and mental health support, as well as cash assistance to allow people to purchase the goods they require.

[PWS&D Gaza Relief](#)

The Presbyterian Church in Canada asks that people pray for all who are affected and threatened and for an end to violence and a just peace in the land of Christ's birth.

God of truth, mercy and peace,
 God of life and of reconciliation,
 we mourn the suffering and murder of your people
 and we pray for a just peace
 and reconciliation for the people of Palestine and Israel
 who have endured the burden of violence and conflict for so long.
 Console those who grieve,
 heal the injured,
 comfort those who are alone and afraid,
 protect those who are held hostage, and
 restrain those who would cause more violence
 or act cynically for political gain and power.
 Let wisdom settle on your churches
 and on the governments and leaders of this world
 so that justice is sought,
 reconciliation found,
 peace established and
 security provided for all.
 In the name of Jesus, we pray.
 Amen.

STATEMENTS AND LETTERS SIGNED BY THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

[#StopSendingArms - An Open Call to All UN Member States to Stop Fuelling the Crisis in Gaza and Avert Further Humanitarian Catastrophe and Loss of Civilian Life](#)

[Letter from ACT Canada to Government of Canada March 2024 re Gaza](#)

[Letter from the Moderator Concerning the Violence between Hamas and Israel](#)

[Ecumenical Statement \(published October 14, 2023\)](#)

KAIROS Canada and its member churches and agencies condemn the current violence against Israeli and Palestinian civilians in Israel, Gaza, the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem and call on Canada to do everything in its power to support an immediate ceasefire and a negotiated solution.

In response to the spiralling violence, they have issued an ecumenical statement, **A Cry to End the Violence and to uphold the rights of all civilians to life and freedom from violence and discrimination.** In it, they write:

“We join the voices of those in the region and others in Canada and internationally in urging the Canadian Government to support a ceasefire and a negotiated resolution to this violence. The pain and tragedy of the growing numbers of civilian lives, Israeli and Palestinian, lost in the violence to date are evidence of the need for an immediate ceasefire, not an escalation of violence.”



View or download the full statement:

[View](#) | [Download](#)

ECUMENICAL CHURCH STATEMENTS

- [An open letter to Palestinian Christians from Christians in Canada](#) in response to “[An Open Letter from Palestinian Christians to Western Church Leaders and Theologians.](#)” [Read more](#)
- The World Council of Churches (WCC) executive committee, meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, on 8-14 November, released a statement that demands an immediate ceasefire and the opening of humanitarian corridors in Palestine and Israel. <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-demands-immediate-ceasefire-humanitarian-corridors-in-palestine-and-israel>
- In an earlier statement, church leaders in the Holy Land raised their united voices and called for the cessation of all violent and military activities that bring harm to both Palestinian and Israeli civilians and respect for human rights. <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/church-leaders-in-holy-land-call-for-de-escalation-respect-for-human-rights> (published October 12, 2023).
- The World Council of Churches (WCC), of which the PCC is a member, also issued an urgent appeal for an immediate ceasefire in Israel and Palestine, condemning any acts that target civilians, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or faith. <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-urgently-appeals-for-immediate-ceasefire-in-israel-and-palestine> (published October 7, 2023).
- The statement from the Patriarch and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem on the current devastating situation in Gaza can be read here: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/blog/2023/10/13/statement-of-the-patriarchs-and-heads-of-the-churches-in-jerusalem-on-the-escalating-humanitarian-crisis-in-gaza/> (published October 13, 2023).

Read the ACT Palestine Forum’s statement on the violence in Gaza

PARENTS CIRCLE FAMILY FORUM (PCFF)

This year’s recipient of the PCC’s [Cutting Edge of Mission Award](#), Parents Circle Family Forum, wrote in the earliest days of the violence that the “relentless cycle of conflict has inflicted immeasurable pain and suffering on innocent lives. It is a time of great sorrow, knowing that countless families now bear the burden of emptiness in their hearts and the heavy weight of grief due to the tragic loss of their loved ones.” The Forum is made up of parents, both Israeli and Palestinian, who have lost children due to the ongoing conflict. You can watch the videos of the presentation during the 2023 General Assembly and the two recipients of the award on behalf of PCFF, [Laila AlSheikh](#) and [Robi Damelin](#) , [here](#).





In the earliest hours of the unfolding conflict, the PCC received a statement from Parents Circle Family Forum (PCFF) on behalf of its co-directors, saying:

“The toll of violence is not just counted in numbers; it is measured in the shattered dreams, the untapped potential, and the irreplaceable bonds severed by these horrifying actions. The victims, both seen and unseen, deserve our unwavering support and empathy as they grapple with the profound trauma inflicted upon them.”

“It is an undeniable truth that the time has come to change the situation. This region has endured too much pain, too much bloodshed, and too many tears. It is a moment for all parties involved to reflect on the senselessness of this continued conflict and to recognize the shared humanity that binds us all.”

“Let us remember that violence begets violence, and the only way forward is through peaceful dialogue, diplomacy, and a commitment to finding common ground. It is a call to action for leaders, communities, and individuals alike to seek solutions that prioritize reconciliation, justice, and lasting peace.”