



A Response to Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth

Introduction

In December 2015, Pax Christi Metro DC-Baltimore (PCMDCB) began a discernment process related to the use of individual and collective nonviolent actions, including boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) strategies, as a pathway towards realizing peace and justice in Israel-Palestine.

This discernment was sparked by two requests. First, Pax Christi local group members in the region who were already engaged in BDS activities had requested support for their efforts, given the political climate of anti-BDS legislation nationally and in our region.

Second, PCMDCB received a personalized request from Kairos Palestine, representing most of the Palestinian Christian leadership, “to be more vocal and active in translating the prophetic voice of the Church and its related branches into concrete actions” by affirming the BDS approach as one strategy among others.¹

During the following months, the PCMDCB Regional Council engaged in prayer and study concerning the issues. In our study, we reviewed the Kairos Palestine document;² held listening sessions with local group members already engaged in BDS activities; and reviewed numerous articles and other written materials, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,”³ which was a response to critics of his boycott activities. We were also blessed during this period with the Holy Father’s 2016 World Day of Peace message, entitled “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace.”⁴

While acknowledging the legitimate grievances of both Israelis and Palestinians and the responsibility of actors on both sides for violence against the other, we cannot ignore the gross imbalance of power in favor of Israel and the use of that power to sustain the occupation and annexation of Palestinian land, the presence and expansion of illegal settlements, and the wholesale blockade of Gaza. We affirm the right of Israelis to live in peace and security, but we are critical of Israeli policies that make attainment of that goal more difficult by denying the same right to Palestinians.

Declaration of Support

In recognition of the cherished and powerful role that nonviolent action plays in crafting justice and appealing to people of conscience, PCMDCB endorses the following positions:

1. We support the goals of the BDS movement initiated by Palestinian civil society, while recognizing that people of good will can disagree on the use of BDS to achieve those goals. We oppose anti-BDS resolutions and legislation, and we affirm the rights of our members and others to advocate for BDS as a nonviolent strategy.
2. We support BDS strategies directed at Israel’s illegal settlement of lands seized in the 1967 war, including in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. We call for the boycott of products and services from such settlements,⁵ for divestment from enterprises providing such products and

services or engaging in real estate transactions or construction activity related to such settlements, and for sanctions against Israel's illegal settlement activity.

3. We support BDS strategies directed at the Israeli's illegal occupation of lands seized in the 1967 war and its blockade of the Gaza Strip. We call for the boycott of products and services from enterprises that support the Israeli occupation and blockade (e.g., by providing private security services, constructing or operating separation barriers and other mechanisms to restrict Palestinians' right of movement, or providing equipment and services specific to the needs of the military occupation),⁶ for divestment from all such enterprises, and for sanctions against Israel's continued occupation and blockade.

Resolution for Future Action

Beyond declaring its support for BDS goals and strategies, the PCMDCB Regional Council resolves to take such further steps as we can to promote peace and justice in Israel-Palestine.

Pray – We commit to praying for a secure common future where all the people of Israel-Palestine may live in dignity, security, and peace. We encourage our local group and at-large members to pray individually and to offer prayers of petition for this intention in their respective parishes.

Study – We call upon our membership to study the Kairos Palestine “A Moment of Truth” appeal by our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters. We further request our members to serve as good stewards of this prophetic message and seek out opportunities to amplify the signatories' voice in the West by educating our parish communities and other Catholics about the “faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian Christian suffering.”⁷

Dialogue – We commit to dialogue with others in the Pax Christi family, including Pax Christi USA and other Pax Christi regions within the U.S., regarding BDS and to encourage them to join in supporting these strategies for a just solution to the ongoing conflict. We will look for opportunities to dialogue with others regarding BDS, including USCCB and other peace and justice groups in our area.

Act – We affirm and support engagement in a spectrum of nonviolent witness and action, including on-the-ground peacemaking, advocacy with elected officials, personal boycott of products, and participation in larger institutional BDS activities. We also affirm and support the activities of Pax Christi International and its collaborating partners around the 50th anniversary of the Occupation in June 2017, as well as the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, the annual Week of Peace, pilgrimages, visits, exchanges, articles, and advocacy letters intended to support nonviolent local activism and protest unjust policies of the Israeli government.

As with the many other social justice issues our members are engaged in, we have faith in their individual approaches and decisions in applying the principles of nonviolence. However, as guiding principles, we offer the following:

- An adherence to the six Kingian principles of nonviolence⁸ and the concept of an inclusive “beloved community”;

- The recognition that BDS, like all direct action, is not a goal unto itself, but rather “seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue”;⁹
- Acknowledgment of the dignity and divine origin of all individuals we encounter, including those who hold positions different from ours; and
- A patient and steadfast commitment to love, hope, and reconciliation in all our efforts.

Adopted by the Pax Christi Metro DC-Baltimore Regional Council on this 7th day of May, 2016.

¹ Letter from Kairos Palestine to Susan Kerin, Dec. 3, 2015, <http://www.paxchristimetrodc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Letter-from-Kairos-Palestine-12-03-2015.pdf>.

² “A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Christian Suffering,” www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/files/English.pdf.

³ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Apr. 16, 1963, www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

⁴ Pope Francis, “Overcome Indifference and Win Peace,” Jan. 1, 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20151208_messaggio-xlix-giornata-mondiale-pace-2016.html.

⁵ E.g., United Methodist Kairos Response, “Public Companies Profiting from Illegal Israeli Settlements on Palestinian Land,” www.kairosresponse.org/companies_support_isr_occup.html; Who Profits: The Israeli Occupation Industry, www.whoprofits.org.

⁶ E.g., Who Profits: The Israeli Occupation Industry, “Control of Population,” www.whoprofits.org/involvement/control-population.

⁷ See Kairos Palestine Document (endnote 2 above).

⁸ The King Center, “The King Philosophy: Six Principles of Nonviolence,” <http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy#sub2>.

⁹ See “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (endnote 3 above).