



Seeking Peace in Israel and Palestine: A Resolution for Mennonite Church USA

For consideration by the Delegate Assembly at Orlando 2017

But they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid. – Micah 4.4

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. – Matthew 5.9

1 **Summary**

2 *As followers of Jesus and his gospel of reconciliation, we long for peace, security, and the well-*
3 *being of all people living in Israel and Palestine.*

4 *We have heard the cry for justice of Palestinians, especially those living under oppressive military*
5 *occupation for fifty years. We are also acutely aware of antisemitism and violence inflicted upon*
6 *Jews in the past and the present. The suffering of these two groups has too often been set against*
7 *the other. We recognize, rather, that the legacy of Jewish suffering is intertwined with the*
8 *suffering of Palestinians.*

9 *In this situation, there are Palestinians and Jews who work for justice and peace for all, rejecting*
10 *violence and oppression. We are blessed to count them as partners and seek to support them and*
11 *learn from them.*

12 *We confess that we, as Mennonites, as Christians, and as Americans, bear some responsibilities*
13 *for the injustice and violence that both peoples have experienced historically and currently.*

14 *We commit ourselves to take active and specific steps to redress these harms. On one hand, we*
15 *will oppose military occupation and seek a just peace in Israel and Palestine; on the other, we will*
16 *seek deeper relationships with Jewish communities and actively oppose antisemitism.*

1 Resolution

2 As followers of Jesus and his gospel of reconciliation, we long for peace, security, justice, and flourishing
3 of all people living in Israel-Palestine, including Jews, Christians, and Muslims.¹

4 We have heard the cry of Palestinian Christians including *Kairos Palestine, A moment of truth: A word of*
5 *faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*. The Palestinian people have suffered
6 injustices, violence, and humiliation, including the Crusades, colonialism, and since 1967, life under Israeli
7 military occupation² and in refugee camps throughout the Middle East. The Jewish people have suffered
8 violence, often at the hands of western Christians, including the Inquisition, pogroms, and the atrocities
9 of the Holocaust. Jews continue to experience antisemitism and violence in many countries today.³

10 The suffering of these two groups has too often been set one against the other. We recognize, rather, that
11 the legacy of Jewish suffering is intertwined with the suffering of Palestinians. Palestinians have often
12 borne the consequences of persecution of Jews. The longing for a secure Jewish state and hostility to Jews
13 resulted in many Jews fleeing to Palestine and establishing the state of Israel. They displaced hundreds of
14 thousands of Palestinians, who remain refugees, and failed to provide genuine equality for those who
15 remained. The continued threat to the security of Jewish people around the world has been used to justify
16 the oppressive military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza since 1967.⁴

17 As U.S. citizens, as Christians, and as Mennonites, we share responsibility in the harms done to Jews and
18 Palestinians. In the two sections that follow, this resolution calls us to address both military occupation
19 and antisemitism. As we acknowledge our own complicity in this web of violence, injustice, and suffering,
20 we will strive, by God's grace, to take concrete steps to address these wrongs.

21 **Opposing Military Occupation and Seeking a Just Peace**

22 Mennonites have been present in Israel-Palestine for more than 65 years, responding to humanitarian
23 need, supporting sustainable development, advocating for justice, supporting reconciliation, and
24 nurturing long-standing relationships.

25 We hear our Palestinian and Israeli partners in peacemaking tell us that fifty years of Israeli military
26 occupation is a major contributor to the cycle of violence between Israelis and Palestinians. Occupation
27 includes land confiscation, rapidly expanding Israeli settlements, home demolitions, checkpoints, walls,
28 travel restrictions, extended administrative detention, arrest of children, and extra-judicial killings.

29 We hear the call from both Jews and Palestinians to have a state that affirms their peoplehood and history
30 and that protects their unique cultures, civil rights, freedoms, security, and dignity. We recognize that for
31 many Jews the state of Israel in its 1967 borders offers these protections. We recognize that Palestinians

¹ In this resolution, the term "Israel-Palestine" refers to the areas of the present-day state of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

² "Israeli military occupation" refers to the Israeli military control of Palestinian territory seized by Israel in 1967, consisting of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. (Though Israel pulled troops out of the Gaza Strip in 2005, the United Nations and human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch consider Gaza occupied territory because Israel exercises effective control of the area through control of borders, military incursions, and other means.)

³ Antisemitism refers to the discrimination against, violence toward, or stereotypes of Jews for being Jewish.

⁴ This resolution addresses harms past and present to the Jewish community worldwide and also specific policies of the Israeli government. Though many Jews feel a strong connection to the state of Israel, it is not accurate to identify or equate the Jewish people with the Israeli government.

32 do not have these protections either in the state of Israel, in the Palestinian territories, or in refugee
33 camps.

34 Both Israelis and Palestinians have used violence in their effort to achieve security for their own
35 group. Some Palestinians have turned to violence to seek their freedom. We recognize that many Israelis
36 see themselves as a minority in a hostile region. In response, Israel has developed the strongest military
37 in the region, is the largest recipient of U.S. military aid in the world, and controls many aspects of
38 Palestinian life. Yet Israelis continue to feel threatened and under attack. Violence has not been effective
39 for either Palestinians or Israelis and threatens to dehumanize and corrupt both communities.

40
41 But there are also Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers who reject violence and militarism, resist injustice
42 without weapons, and take great risks to work for a just peace. They believe that security cannot be
43 achieved for one group without security for all others living in the region. They reduce fear, heal traumas,
44 and build bridges. This helps create the context for genuine and fair negotiations. As Mennonite followers
45 of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we are inspired and challenged by these partners.

46 In our own nation, we are mindful of historic and systemic injustices and the ways some of us have
47 benefited from and are complicit in these wrongs, including the forced removal of indigenous people from
48 their land, the legacy of slavery and racism, and a broken immigration system. While the history and
49 dynamics of each injustice are unique, the work for justice in any one place is linked to the work for justice
50 everywhere. We continue to be called to name and address our part in harms at home, in Israel-Palestine,
51 and throughout the world.

52 **Confession and Lament**

53 As Western Christians, Mennonites, and U.S. citizens, we confess and lament the ways we have supported
54 the military occupation, which has grievously harmed and traumatized the Palestinian people and has not
55 served the well-being and long-term security of Israelis:

- 56 • Failing to adequately understand the harms done to Palestinians in the creation of the state of
57 Israel, as second-class citizens of Israel,⁵ and under Israel's military occupation
- 58 • Failing to understand the dramatic power imbalance experienced by Palestinians living under
59 Israeli military occupation
- 60 • Being too slow to relate to Palestinian Christians as part of the body of Christ
- 61 • Embracing or tolerating Christian Zionist theology, which too often has disregarded the well-being
62 of Palestinian people⁶
- 63 • Accepting negative stereotypes of Palestinians, especially those based on anti-Muslim and anti-
64 Arab biases
- 65 • Not adequately supporting both Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers, who reject violence and
66 choose the creative and courageous path of active non-violence
- 67 • Contributing tax dollars to the \$3.8 billion of annual U.S. military aid to Israel, some of which
68 undergirds the military occupation, and failing to challenge U.S. government support for the
69 military occupation
- 70 • Benefiting from companies that are actively participating in the occupation.

⁵ Israel includes Jewish and Palestinian citizens. Israel's population is 20% Palestinian. When this resolution refers to Israelis, it includes this often forgotten minority. This does not refer to Palestinians living under occupation, who do not have Israeli citizenship.

⁶ Christian Zionist theology advocates the gathering of the Jews in Biblical Israel, typically as a prerequisite for the Second Coming of Jesus, and that Christians should support the state of Israel.

71 **Commitments**

72 ***Partnering with Palestinian and Israeli Peacemakers:*** We commit to continue to learn from, partner with,
73 and pray for Palestinian and Israeli groups and individuals working for peace with justice. We applaud
74 individuals and groups who organize nonviolent protests and movements, refuse military service, and
75 build bridges across divisions.

76 ***Understanding the Realities of Occupation:*** We encourage Mennonite congregations and area
77 conferences to learn about the situation, including studying *Kairos Palestine*. We urge our members who
78 travel to Israel-Palestine to seek out diverse Palestinian and Israeli voices to better understand their
79 experiences and perspectives.

80 ***Engaging Christian Zionism:*** We urge pastors, teachers, and appropriate church agencies to engage
81 Christian Zionism within our own church and in the broader American Christian community, encouraging
82 Christian Zionists to enter into conversation and relationship with our Palestinian Christian partners and,
83 as followers of Jesus, to pursue a nonviolent, inclusive, and just vision for Jewish and Palestinian
84 coexistence in the Holy Land.

85 ***Advocating with the U.S. Government:*** We urge members, congregations and denominational offices of
86 Mennonite Church USA to advocate with the U.S. government to end military aid and arms sales in the
87 region, and to support measures that pressure Israel to freeze settlement construction, respect the civil
88 rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel and the rights of refugees, end the occupation, and work for a just
89 peace in accordance with international law.

90 ***Avoiding Economic Support for Occupation while Investing in Peace and Justice:*** As people who seek to
91 follow Jesus in daily life, we know that how we spend and invest our money is an important part of our
92 faith life. Concerns about simplicity, fair trade, and sustainability guide our individual and institutional
93 purchasing decisions. We urge individuals and congregations to avoid the purchase of products associated
94 with acts of violence or policies of military occupation, including items produced in settlements. Likewise,
95 Mennonites have spent years developing investment strategies that reflect our deepest convictions. We
96 want to invest in peace with justice, not to profit or benefit from the suffering of others. We ask Everence,
97 on behalf of Mennonite Church USA, to periodically convene representatives of Mennonite related
98 organizations and agencies involved in the region, in order to share counsel and review investment
99 practices for the purpose of withdrawing investments from companies that are profiting from the
100 occupation. We urge all Mennonite Church USA agencies, related organizations, and members to similarly
101 review their investments.

102 ***Strengthening Relationships with Muslim and Palestinian-American communities:*** Recognizing the
103 growing anti-Muslim and anti-Arab prejudice within our culture, we commit to strengthening our
104 relationships with Muslim communities, educating ourselves about our similarities and differences, and
105 working for equality, tolerance, and acceptance of Muslims in our society.

106 **Opposing Antisemitism and Seeking Right Relationship with Jewish Communities**

107 Both Mennonites and Jews have had the experience of being religious minorities in western Christian
 108 contexts. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Catholic and Protestant leaders persecuted
 109 both Mennonites and Jewish people. At times, Mennonites and Jews were neighbors as they were given
 110 refuge by tolerant authorities. Nonetheless, in many settings Mennonites adopted the negative attitudes
 111 of the prevailing Christian culture towards our Jewish neighbors.

112 **Confession and Lament**

113 As Western Christians, Mennonites, and U.S. citizens, we confess and lament the ways we have
 114 participated in harms against Jewish people:

- 115 • Failing to do the hard work of examining our participation in antisemitic belief and practice
- 116 • Bearing complicity in the Holocaust that killed six million Jews, failing to respond to Jewish
 117 refugees fleeing Europe, and failing to fully examine the historic record of Mennonite complicity
 118 in these atrocities
- 119 • Ignoring the gravity of ongoing antisemitism and acts of violence against Jewish people
- 120 • Failing to recognize how these past and present threats contribute to the need for security for
 121 Jewish people
- 122 • Neglecting to build relationships with Jewish representatives and communities in the United
 123 States and to recognize diverse expressions of their hopes and fears
- 124 • Failing to understand the significance of the state of Israel for many Jewish people and the
 125 diversity of perspectives and understandings among Jews related to Israel and Zionism.

126 **Commitments**

127 ***Examining the Legacy of Antisemitism:*** Mennonite Church USA staff have raised seed money and initiated
 128 plans for several conferences in the next biennium on topics including Mennonite involvement in the
 129 Holocaust and how we read scripture in light of the Holocaust. We affirm these efforts and encourage
 130 Mennonite schools and agencies to consider similar initiatives. We request that sponsors of each event
 131 record and share findings within Mennonite Church USA and with Mennonite World Conference to
 132 explore ways we might continue to address antisemitism in our tradition.

133 ***Building Relationships with Jewish Communities***

- 134 • We call on Mennonites to cultivate relationships with Jewish representatives and bodies in the
 135 U.S.
- 136 • We encourage area conferences to commission at least one congregation to reach out to a local
 137 synagogue in their community to build relationships, listen deeply to their experiences, and learn
 138 from them.
- 139 • We encourage Mennonites to build relationships and partnerships with Jewish groups and
 140 individuals in the U.S. who pursue their calling to social justice and peacemaking.
- 141 • As we cultivate relationships with Jewish communities in the U.S. and Israel we will be attentive
 142 to and seek a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives that Jewish people have of the
 143 state of Israel and Zionism.

144 **Prayer and Action**

145 We commit ourselves to ‘pray without ceasing’ (1 Thessalonians 5.17) for all people in Israel-Palestine,
 146 especially for those impacted by violence and those working for peace, even as we take concrete steps to
 147 examine our own complicity in injustices past and present.

148 We request that a report on the activities related to this resolution be submitted to the next Mennonite
 149 Church USA delegate assembly

1 Clarifications

- 2 1. **Why should Mennonite Church USA be involved in Israel-Palestine?** As Mennonites, Christians, and
 3 U.S. citizens, we are already involved in both helpful and harmful ways. The appeal of Palestinian
 4 Christian brothers and sisters challenges us to pray and work for peace with justice in that land. A
 5 history of antisemitism, especially among Western Christians, compels us to wrestle with our role in
 6 the origins and perpetuation of this injustice and conflict. As citizens of the United States, whose
 7 government provides massive financial, military, and political support for the state of Israel and its
 8 policies of occupation, we feel a particular responsibility for the ongoing suffering. Finally, conflict in
 9 that small area contributes to mistrust and violence throughout the region and beyond. Our
 10 commitment to the Prince of Peace beckons us to strive for God's justice and peace for all the people
 11 of this region.
- 12 2. **How did this resolution develop?** A resolution on Israel-Palestine was brought to delegates at the
 13 Mennonite Church USA assembly in Kansas City in 2015. Delegates tabled that resolution, asking that
 14 it be revised, and called for a period of learning and discernment as we seek to support Palestinian
 15 and Israeli peacemakers. Through numerous drafts, a three-person writing committee prepared this
 16 resolution in consultation with a diverse, ten-person reference group and tested this resolution with
 17 a range of Palestinian, Israeli, and Jewish partners.
- 18 3. **What is *Kairos Palestine*?** *Kairos Palestine* was prepared and distributed in 2009 by a broad group of
 19 Palestinian Christian leaders including Catholic, Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Evangelicals. This
 20 document is especially compelling to Mennonites because of its deep commitment to Jesus' way of
 21 love even in the face of great suffering and severe injustice. It includes a call for economic boycotts
 22 and divestment from companies that support the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. It affirms
 23 that only a nonviolent resistance based on love of enemy and a repudiation of revenge can lead to
 24 just peace and reconciliation.
- 25 4. **Have Mennonites supported using financial pressure for the cause of justice and peace on other
 26 matters?** As people who seek to follow Jesus in daily life, Mennonites have long sought to practice
 27 our faith in our economic activities. Refusal to buy war bonds, for example, was a principled and costly
 28 decision for Mennonites in decades past. Mennonites have been at the forefront of developing
 29 socially- responsible investment practices. Everence, our denominational stewardship agency, has
 30 long employed investment screens that preclude profiting from military production, the alcohol
 31 industry, and companies with a record of human rights abuses. Ten Thousand Villages has been a
 32 leader in promoting fair trade purchasing, and increasingly churches and members consistently
 33 purchase fair trade coffee. In response to a denominational resolution about human trafficking and
 34 child slavery, Everence served as a primary force in leading American chocolate companies to shift
 35 towards child labor-free cocoa-sourcing, which especially impacts communities in West Africa. These
 36 are but a few of the ways in which Mennonites have sought to make responsible consumer and
 37 investment choices and use our economic power for the cause of justice and peace.
- 38 5. **What is BDS? How does this resolution relate to BDS?** The BDS Movement (boycott, divestment, and
 39 sanctions) was launched in 2005 by 170 Palestinian civil society organizations calling for economic,
 40 cultural, and academic boycotts of Israel. The appeal named three demands: an end to occupation of
 41 the West Bank and Gaza, equal rights for the Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the right of return for
 42 displaced refugees. This initiative was promoted in light of failed efforts to bring peace through
 43 negotiations or international mechanisms such as the United Nations. There are vigorous critics of
 44 BDS who raise a range of concerns. Many Palestinian Christian groups as well as some Jewish peace
 45 organizations support BDS as a nonviolent alternative to violent liberation efforts.
- 46 This resolution offers a unique Mennonite voice. It opposes Israeli military occupation and U.S.
 47 support while intentionally affirming the need to reach out to build stronger relationships with Jewish

48 communities. This resolution calls on Mennonites to apply long-standing stewardship principles and
49 strongly affirms Palestinian and Israeli advocates of nonviolence. While the resolution does not call
50 for a boycott of all Israeli goods or for academic or cultural boycotts, it urges Mennonites to avoid
51 purchases and investments directly related to the military occupation of Palestinian territories.

52 6. **Why is it important for Mennonites to address antisemitism?** Mennonites, like most western
53 Christians, have been parties to the antisemitism of the prevailing culture. As members of an Historic
54 Peace Church, many Mennonites may assume that our tradition responded differently at critical
55 historical moments. Significant scholarship, including recent research, highlights ways some
56 Mennonites were complicit in the Holocaust. As a faith community, we have not done the hard work
57 of examining our historic complicity or the ways antisemitism has shaped our perspectives and life,
58 including how we read the Bible. Uncovering, confessing, and repenting for our antisemitism and
59 historic complicity in bringing harm to Jewish people is critical for our own integrity and faithfulness.
60 We pray it may also contribute to healing and to the cause of peace.

61 In recent years, Mennonite Church USA has taken small steps on this path. We have compiled a
62 bibliography on Mennonite-Jewish relations, have acquired a grant to facilitate consultations, have
63 encouraged an evolving alliance between Mennonite and Jewish activists and scholars for social
64 justice around the world, and have begun exploring opportunities for more formal relations with
65 Jewish leaders. There are individuals among us who have entered deeply into relationship with Jewish
66 colleagues and partners. They will be valuable resources to the broader church as we continue this
67 journey.

68 7. **Is this resolution consistent with the principles of Mennonite peacebuilding?** The resolution
69 embraces a restorative justice framework, naming ways Mennonites have participated in harms and
70 taking concrete steps to address these wrongs. The resolution pursues a “two-handed” approach,
71 both speaking clearly against any injustice and violence and also extending a hand of understanding
72 and relationship to all parties. We will do both, not making one conditional upon the other, even if
73 pressed to do so. The resolution recognizes that it is difficult for injustices to be heard when there is
74 a major power imbalance. Addressing this power imbalance is part of the work of peacemaking and
75 reconciliation.

76 8. **Does this resolution advocate for a "two-state" or "one-state" solution?** This resolution does not
77 advocate for any particular solution or any particular vision of statehood. Within both communities
78 there are many differing ideas on this matter. Both Israeli and Palestinian people desire to live in
79 safety and freedom and it is ultimately up to them, not Mennonites, to determine what that will look
80 like.