

A moment of truth: Kairos Palestine

Presentation of the document in Istanbul (Turkey)

Thank you for inviting me here to talk about the document Kairos Palestine. I think it is important to have a dialogue here in the international meeting of the ICCJ, a council that addresses issues of “*human rights and counter all forms of prejudice, intolerance, discrimination, racism and misuse of religion for nation and political domination*”.

What is the Kairos? And why now?

In Palestine, we are living a moment of not only a lack of political perspective, but a moment of lack of hope as well for a better future and an end to occupation. Everyone is talking about peace, peace negotiations, peace process... what we see on the ground and what we experience in our daily life is the opposite of peace; Peace is not the absence of war, it is the fruit of justice.

The reality on the ground is the following:

Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories continues since 1967. The separation wall is erected around and between our towns and villages; the Israeli settlements make the idea of a Palestinian State impossible; we experience daily humiliation at the military checkpoints; the religious liberty is severely restricted; the refugees are still living in camps, thousands of prisoners are still in Israeli prisons, and Jerusalem continues to be a city of exclusion, and human rights are violated.

We can continue for ages to talk about responsibilities, whom to blame, etc. We felt it is time to do something about it. After long years of peace process, which turned to be an endless process of negotiations without peace or a perspective of a possible peace, we needed to act, to make our voices heard. That is how this cry of hope against any hope came out.

That is why a group of Christian Palestinians met for two years and came out with the Kairos document. We are faced by a complex situation, which is why we turned to our faith to see its message for us in our situation. The Kairos document is addressed first to us, to the Christians living in Palestine.

After speaking of our reality especially the lack of hope, we explore our faith. At one point, we thought of calling the document “enough!”, but this is not a biblical concept, we thought of “Until when oh Lord”; this may seem desperate! Then we came out with “Kairos. A moment of truth. A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the heart of Palestinian suffering”.

In the first part of the document, we renew **our faith** in God, the just and loving God of all human beings; our faith in Jesus Christ. We affirm the unity of the Old and New Testaments;

it is in Jesus Christ that we can understand the promises of God in the Old Testament, including the promise of the land.

The Palestinian Israeli conflict is a **political conflict**, not a religious one. There is a **religious dimension** of the conflict, as this is the Holy Land; there is opposite claims to possess this land.

What complicates our situation are those voices coming from the West, **justifying this injustice with the Word of God**; we did not lose our land only, we began to lose the Word of God as it was used against us. Instead of being Good News giving life, the Bible was transformed into an ideology spreading death.

There are certain Western post-holocaust theologies that use the Word of God to justify injustice committed against us. *“The revisionist Christian theology that emerged following the Holocaust attempted to correct the legacy of Christian anti-Semitism. In the process it has fostered an unquestioning support of the State of Israel that undermines efforts to achieve peace in the region”*.

We, as Christian Palestinians, we suffer twice: *“We suffer from the occupation of the Land because we are Palestinians; and certain theologians want us to suffer for our faith because we are Christians”* (2.3.4). That is why we say that *“any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, transform religion into human ideology and strip the Word of God of its holiness”* (2.3.4); *“Any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war... and distorts the divine image in the human beings”* (2.5).

Here we are talking mainly about the Christian Zionist eschatological theologies. Certain theologies in Europe had political implications, encouraging an uncritical support for the policies of the State of Israel, not always in an intentional way. The situations differ from one country to another.

In the Kairos document, the group made **few decisions**. First, we are not politicians, and we do not pretend to present a political plan to resolve the conflict. The document is not a political statement; we do not talk about political solutions, it is up to the politicians to decide, even if we believe in a two-state solution living in peace together.

Second, we avoided a historical analysis of the conflict. To begin the game of blaming each other, or to say who was responsible in the past, will get us nowhere. The present is the crucial moment to move ahead, and the future is a challenge; either we all live in justice, peace and security, or we will have an endless conflict and more sufferings for both peoples.

Third, we do not present a theological reading of the Bible, especially the Old Testament on the issues of Land and Promises. We try to understand them through our faith in Jesus Christ, the one who is the fulfillment of Scriptures and who explains it to us. So the document is not a theological document, so you will not find a theology of the land or of the promises.

The document is not a cry from the Palestinian churches to ask the world to help them. We have a Palestinian problem, not a Christian one. It is a cry of hope, based on our faith in God and in many people who believe in justice. We can never lose hope. And we see signs of hope in the life of our churches, our communities, in the increasing awareness of the importance of justice for the Palestinians, and in the solidarity of many churches in the world.

The main message of the document is that: the Palestinians live under occupation for the last 43 years, and this occupation should end. The main message of the Kairos document is that occupation is a sin against God and human beings. And our duty is to resist sin, with non-violent means. We believe in non-violent actions. Will the end of occupation end the conflict? The end of occupation will be a major shift in the conflict allowing the possibility to find solutions for other issues, including violence and terrorism; occupations harms the Palestinians in the first place, but it harms the Israelis too.

Everyone agrees on a two-state solution; Israel was created and recognized, even by the Palestinians, and no one is questioning that. It is time to work for the independence of the Palestinians; enough with the endless process of negotiations; it is time to do something. Occupation is dehumanizing the Palestinians and creating insecurity and fear for the Israelis. The document says: *"We call on the Israelis to end the occupation. Then they will see a new world in which there is no fear, no threat but rather security, justice and peace (1.4). "Occupation distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier, just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation" (2.5).*

The document is **a word of faith and action**. The Word of God is "Good News". We want it to remain the Word of life, justice and peace.

That is why **our response to all this is love**, the Christian commandment of love; a positive, pro-active, costly love. The Christian love is for everyone, including the enemy. Resisting evil with love and non-violent ways is part of that Christian love. That is why we call on Palestinian Christians first, and then on the churches in the world, Muslims and Jews to join us in our struggle against injustice and oppression, against occupation as an evil, a sin, a struggle for life against death, for liberty and justice – always in the logic of love and respect to

life, the life of every human being, Palestinian and Israeli as well, to liberate the occupied from occupation, and to liberate the occupiers as well from fear and insecurity.

In the document we read: *“If there were no occupation, there would be no resistance, no fear and no insecurity.”* (1.4). If we are Palestinians, worried about the oppression of the Palestinian people, we want also the Israelis to live in peace, security and justice, liberating them from occupation.

At the end, we want to live as peaceful neighbors. In the document we also read: *“God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God's land”* (2.3.1); and: *“The aim is to free both peoples from extremist positions of the different Israeli governments, bringing both to justice and reconciliation”* (4.2.6); and finally: *“Through our love, we will overcome injustices and establish foundations for a new society both for us and for our opponents. Our future and their future are one... We call on the people of Israel to be our partners in peace and not in the cycle of interminable violence. Let us resist evil together, the evil of occupation and the infernal cycle of violence”* (4.3).

When we wrote the document, we meant what we said, and only what we said. Several times the document was read in a way not intended by the authors. When we talk about occupation, we mean the occupation according to common understanding of the word that is Palestinian lands occupied in 1967; so it is clear that we are talking about the two-state solution. When we say that Christ fulfills the Scriptures, we understand it in the sense Jesus himself expressed it when he said that he came to fulfill the scriptures; and that is not replacement theology; when we talk about our connectedness to this land as a natural right and that we want to live freely in our land, we do not mean denying the connectedness of others, it is our connectedness that is denied, and you can see that clearly in the Christian Zionist theologies ... etc. The document has a message, that is what the document is all about. Are we able to hear that message?

Thank you,

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Fr. Jamal Khader