

*For adoption*

## **ACT Alliance public statement on peace and human rights in Israel and Palestine**

ACT Alliance affirms the need for two viable and sovereign independent states of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in accordance with the UN resolutions with 1967 borders and with Jerusalem as a shared city for two people and three religions Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

The Oslo Accords celebrated 25 years ago, have so far not resulted in peace for Israelis and Palestinians. Oslo's promise of a "just, lasting and comprehensive peace" is not yet fulfilled. While the international aid programs continue to sustain life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, it is evident that they can never achieve political solutions. While the United Nations and its Security Council have passed many resolutions on the situation, real political and legal solutions still need to be found to address the root causes of the suffering. Such solutions must be based on the principles of human rights and international law.

In July, the Israeli Knesset passed a basic law in which Israel declared itself as the "national home of the Jewish people." This law states that the "right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people". Based on international law and human rights law, the nature and the stated intentions of this law are discriminatory, including the promotion of establishing Jewish settlements on occupied Palestinian land. It risks creating double standards for the Bedouins, Druses, Christians and Muslims who should enjoy equal rights.

The plight of the Palestinians has been ongoing since 1948. At the same time, Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, illegal under international humanitarian law, are expanding in the West Bank, and Israel's harsh actions and demolition orders on villages risk forcibly displacing vulnerable populations. This is part of the troubling trend where the government of Israel is systematically demolishing structures and displacing Palestinians in Area C to allow for the expansion of settlements and potentially the annexation of Area C.

Earlier this year, the United States unilaterally recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. According to Palestinians and the majority of nations, this decision confirmed that the current US administration cannot present itself as an impartial broker in any future peace process. The US administration's decision to cut life-saving programs, including its support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) will deepen the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and deteriorate further the socio-economic conditions for many in the West Bank and in neighboring countries. In Gaza alone, 7 out of 10 people rely on emergency aid and the UN has declared that Gaza will be uninhabitable by 2020 due to declining incomes, healthcare, education, electricity shortages and fresh water.

The goal of this decision appears to be to remove the refugee status from millions of Palestinians who claim their right of return to their former homes in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. We believe that such decisions will only exacerbate the catastrophic humanitarian situation and magnify the sense of injustice, hopelessness and disbelief in the humanitarian principles among Palestinians. Humanitarian aid must not be politicized.

These developments have the potential to formulate a horrible recipe for more decades of violence and misery for all parties involved, both on the Palestinian and Israeli sides. The harsh and disproportionate Israeli response to Palestinian protests in Gaza strip earlier this year killed many and left thousands wounded or disabled. Since then reports on violence and deaths have become the norm. All parties and the international community must exercise wisdom and care to find a credible and just pathway out of this situation.

ACT Alliance joins the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) and many other faith-based and civil society organizations in Palestine and Israel in calling for a new principled way forward for peace in Israel and Palestine. An approach based on equality, dignity and justice and guided by international law must ensure accountability with regard to all violations of international law. Just like the Israelis, the Palestinian people's right to self-determination needs to be accepted as a precondition for any peace agreement. Any peace process must recognize the power imbalance between the parties and should include the active participation of civil society, including women and youth. Rights must neither be used as a leverage tool in the negotiations, nor bargained away by the parties in view of their responsibility for vulnerable populations.

In Israel and in Palestine, churches, church-related organizations, and civil society organizations are the main advocates for peace with justice. Currently they face increasing restrictions on how they organize, function and express their views, despite international legal guarantees for such freedoms. ACT Alliance research shows that both Palestinian and Israeli organizations and journalists face increasing legal restrictions, stigmatization and danger in their ongoing work on poverty alleviation, humanitarian assistance and combatting injustices. Aid workers have also increasingly become a target for violence. For peace to flourish in just and democratic societies, freedom and safety for civil society organizations and humanitarian workers must also be protected.

Therefore, the ACT Alliance calls on:

- The government of Israel to cease all sorts of violations of human rights towards the Palestinian people and to respect the international human rights treaties and rule of law and to implement all accords and treaties signed with the PLO
- The Palestinian Authority to uphold human rights of the Palestinian population, and to respect the international human rights treaties and rule of law.
- The government of Israel, neighboring countries and the international community to protect and support Palestinian refugees and their rights, in full recognition of International Humanitarian Law, International Refugee Law and International Human Rights Law, and to condemn political and funding decisions which reduce people living in vulnerable situations to political bargaining chips
- Israel to uphold equal rights for all the people of Israel
- The parties to the conflict to engage in a new principled path towards peace, with a focus on human rights and the accountability of all parties.
- The international community to uphold international law without exception and to actively put pressure on all parties to negotiate in good faith, and to come to a just and lasting agreement on the persistent problems. Third countries need to explicitly state, in line with international law, the legal principle, that the occupation cannot be an accepted permanent final state.
- The US administration to revise its policy regarding funding the Palestinian people and UNRWA
- Churches, and civil society around the world to stand in solidarity with Palestinians and Israelis working for just peace based on international law and UN resolutions, and to protect human rights advocates and other civil society actors in their search for peace with justice

- ACT Members to support local civil society organisations and promote increased protection against rights violations, and to support civil society organisations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel to hold their own authorities to account
- ACT Alliance members and forum to engage with the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority —at the highest level—to cease further introduction of legislation that limits civil society space and to repeal existing legislation and practices restricting space and basic freedoms