

FAIR Christians for Fair Witness on the Middle East WITNESS

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The Kairos Palestine Document, Part II

On December 11, 2009, a group of Palestinian Christian leaders issued the “Kairos Palestine” document. In the words of these leaders, the intention of the document is to address the international churches and “fulfil [the Palestinian Christian] role to make known to you the truth of our reality . . .” But is the Kairos Palestine document itself entirely truthful?

The Kairos Palestine document speaks of a “reality on the ground” that is dominated by Palestinian suffering under war and the Israeli occupation. (Sec. 1) Our churches must understand this suffering.

- But the document is silent with regard to another dominant reality on the ground -- Israeli suffering under terrorism and decades of wars waged against it by virtually all of its neighbors. Our churches must understand this history and this suffering as well.

In its analysis of the “universal mission” of the land, the Kairos Palestine document states that the “Christian and Muslim Palestinians[’ presence], is not accidental but rather deeply rooted in the history and geography of this land . . .” (Sec. 2.3.2) We agree . . .

- But the document explains the Jewish presence merely by stating “The West sought to make amends for what Jews had endured in the countries of Europe, but it made amends on our account and in our land.” (Sec. 2.3.2) In this way the document appears to seek to deny the Jewish connection to the land.
- The Jewish connection to the land is not based on fundamentalist or extreme Biblical interpretations, but rather on significant historic and spiritual connections going back almost four millennia.
- The conflict will be resolved only when Jews and Palestinians recognize and make room not only for their own, but also for one another’s legitimate claims to the land. And the U.S. and international churches must try to act like true peacemakers by recognizing that both claims can and must be accommodated through a negotiated two-state solution.

- Jewish extremists who claim that God gave the land to them and only them and Palestinian extremists who likewise call all the land “our land,” and who deny or minimize the Jewish connection to the land, both stand in the way of peace.

The Kairos Palestine document says that “trying to make the state a religious state, Jewish or Islamic . . . transforms it into a state that practices discrimination and exclusion, preferring one citizen over another.” (Sec. 9.3) . . . But which “state” is the document referring to?

- Jewish nationalism is based on ethnicity or nationhood -- a shared sense of origins -- , and not religion. Just as Israel is nationally Jewish and democratic, we hope for a future state which will be nationally Palestinian and democratic.
- Presumably, a future democratic Palestine will be a nation-state for Palestinians of every religion and will allow for citizenship for non-Palestinians, as well. Just so, Israel is already a nation-state for Jews of various religious identities and provides for citizenship for non-Jews, as well.

The Kairos Palestine document seeks a state that will “be a state for all its citizens . . . not [based] on domination by a religion or a numerical majority.” (Sec. 9.3)

- We also presume that both the future Palestinian state and the Jewish state will continue to strive for tolerance towards their respective minorities – whether they are Jews who choose to live in the Palestinian state, or Palestinians who choose to remain in the Jewish state.
- But the long history of mutual enmity between these people cannot be ignored – and the rights of both will be best protected by ensuring two sovereign states, living side by side in peace but with recognized and secure borders.

Both the Palestinians and the Jewish people are entitled to self-determination in independent, sovereign nations.

- Palestinians and Jews, just like any other “peoples,” defined in terms of a shared sense of origin, history, ethnicity, religion, language and/or culture, each have the right to constitute autonomous and sovereign political communities.
- Each is entitled to a state where they form the majority and are free to determine their own future without being subject to the rule of another.