

97-GS-52 VOTED: The Twenty-First General Synod adopts the Resolution "Palestine / Israel."

RESOLUTION "PALESTINE\ISRAEL"

Introduction:

An important part of the significance of the Holy Land to Christians lies in the living communities of Christians who dwell there. This resolution calls for support of Palestinian Christians in Israel\Palestine, and for recognition of the suffering of all people living there. It affirms that the wounds of the past must not overcome the opportunities for peace in the present.

Theological Rationale:

The Christian Church began in Jerusalem and Jerusalem has served as a spiritual image of a new community gathered in peace where the love of God shall reign. The writer of the Revelation of St. John writes:

I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband ... He will wipe every tear from their eye, Death shall be no more; mourning and crying and pain shall be no more, for the first things have passed away. (Rev.21:2,4)

The city remains a place of pilgrimage and spiritual renewal where scripture, read in the land where it was written, exudes a special aura of authenticity.

Background:

Many Palestinian Christians trace their roots to the first church -- the Jerusalem church. Through the centuries Christians have preserved the holy sites.

Palestinian Christians make up an educated and skilled portion of the Palestinian population often managing schools, hospitals and health clinics open to all. They have persisted in their witness despite invasions, conquests, oppression, and persecutions over the past two thousand years.

Palestinian Christians are a diminishing minority in the Holy Land. Economic uncertainty, deteriorating living conditions, and oppressive violations of human and civil rights have driven them from their land. Constituting 25% of the population of Israel\Palestine in 1900, Christians now comprise 2-3% because of the severity of occupation.

Palestinian Christians call upon the international Christian community for help. In a 1996 conference in Jerusalem attended by 200 Christian leaders from all continents and 30 countries, Palestinian Christians again alerted the international Christian community to their plight and requested advocacy for their concerns.

WHEREAS, the Nineteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ has affirmed that unilateral action regarding the sovereignty of Jerusalem only perpetuates antagonisms and threatens the peace of the region;

WHEREAS, Christians in convention in Jerusalem, in January of 1996, supported Palestinian Christians in their petition to the government of Israel to provide free access to Jerusalem for all; to cease expropriating land and expanding settlements; and to support equal housing rights for Palestinians within the city of Jerusalem;

WHEREAS, closure of Jerusalem to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza separates most Palestinians from the center of their economic, cultural, and political life and prevents most Palestinian Christians and Muslims from worshipping at their holy sites;

WHEREAS, Christians in Bethlehem have had their land confiscated for the building of Israeli settlements and the roads servicing them, which also threatens sacred and historic sites;

WHEREAS, violation of human and civil rights, the use of coercion, and terrorist acts by any party perpetuate an escalating cycle of violence; and

WHEREAS, pertinent United Nations resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 181, placing Jerusalem under a special international regime, have not been implemented;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-first General Synod of the United Church of Christ

supports Palestinian Christians in their insistence that:

1. Jerusalem remain a plural and diverse city both religiously and politically and that no party has the right to change the status of Jerusalem unilaterally;
2. the building of new Israeli settlements in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza cease;
3. Palestinians be permitted to move freely between Gaza, Jerusalem and the West Bank, for jobs, housing, and all services of community and religious life;
4. all governing authorities agree to honor human and civil rights as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations; and
5. all forms of violence and killing cease.

Subject to the availability of funds.