



1967-2007: The “Seventh” Day Has Meant No Respite
A message on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the 1967 War

June 5, 2007

For the last 40 years, the Palestinian people have lived under occupation. For the past 40 years, the Israeli people have lived with an ongoing debate about what to do with the occupied territories. Generations of Palestinians in the occupied territories have experienced checkpoints with soldiers, curfews, and restricted access; home demolitions for the sake of settlement and barrier construction; and a lack of legal status as citizens of any state, forced to obtain permits to visit family, to seek medical care, freely worship in particular churches or mosques, or tend their agricultural fields. Generations of Israelis have experienced mandatory military service in the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai, and the Golan Heights; insecurity resulting from unresolved conflict over the land; and unheeded local and international calls to end the fact and practices of occupation. As the occupation enters its fifth decade, settlements continue to be expanded, the separation barrier continues to be built, and Israeli forces continue to exert control over the Palestinian people within the occupied territories.

June, 1967 represents a watershed moment in the history of the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Forty years ago this week, following provocative actions by Arab states (particularly Egypt’s closing of the Strait of Tiran) and increasing calls within Israel for preemptive military strikes against its neighbors, the Six-Day War or *al-Naksa* [the “setback” in Arabic] resulted in Israeli forces occupying Arab East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula, including Gaza. Since then, the Sinai has been returned to Egypt as a part of the Camp David Agreements and Peace Accords of 1978-1979 between Israel and Egypt, and Israel withdrew settlements and forces from Gaza in autumn, 2005 (yet continues to control access to Gaza).

The United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have consistently called for an end to Israeli occupation of Arab lands, consistent with UN resolutions and international law. We continue to advocate, with increasing urgency, for an end to all violence. Israel must enjoy its full security and sovereignty, next to a viable Palestinian state—also fully secure and sovereign—with borders demarcated by the Green Line (the 1948 armistice line recognized internationally). Jerusalem, a city of deep spiritual importance to all three Abrahamic faiths, must be shared—the capital for both states. The US government should be more deeply engaged as an even-handed influence, as resolution to this conflict is in the interest of Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans.

Beyond the necessary political resolution of conflict, an end to the occupation, and indeed a comprehensive resolution to the broader Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we seek a peace that upholds the dignity and value of every person—Palestinian and Israeli, Jew, Christian, and Muslim. The people of the entire Middle East have suffered far too long, and far too much, as a result of this conflict, at the center of which is the occupation. From the gross militarization of the region to the pregnant mother who is denied access to medical facilities and gives birth at a checkpoint, all levels of society have been impacted in inhumane ways. The occupation has created victims and hostages to a conflict that has become institutionalized, patterns that have become routine in their inadmissibility, and practices that are wholly unacceptable in human terms.

Yet hope lies in daily acts of non-violent resistance: Palestinian schoolchildren passing through barriers and checkpoints to seek their education and Israeli activists proclaiming “Stop the Occupation” from the streets of Jerusalem; Palestinians rebuilding their homes multiple times

on their own land after watching them be demolished and not receiving permits to build, and Israelis protesting home demolitions; Palestinians and Israelis seeking to go about their daily lives, even in the midst of fear; churches the world over offering prayers for peace with justice in many languages, and offering a witness of solidarity and witness with all those who yearn for liberation.

But over the course of four decades, the situation has become exceedingly volatile, and positions have become deeply entrenched. As difficult as it might seem to resolve the outstanding issues (Jerusalem, borders, settlements, refugees, and security), prolonging the political status quo only has resulted in new facts on the occupied ground, including settlements, the separation barrier, and exclusive access roads—all of which have shifted the negotiating parameters and led to increased violence, which we have strongly opposed.

This week, we join with those who call attention to the devastating and unending “seventh” day of the Six-Day War—the results of the 1967 War. The last forty years have not been a “Sabbath” for anyone. We reiterate our commitment to a resolution to this enduring conflict, and to an end to the occupation. Our occupation should be the pursuit of peace with justice for all of God’s people. This week, we join the Heads of Churches of Jerusalem in a prayer they share with all of us:

O loving God,

We remember those who struggle for freedom,
We remember the disabled who cling on to hope,
We remember the injured who fight for their life,
We remember the captives who yearn for freedom,
We remember the deportees who long for the homeland.
We remember our towns, villages and camps that are often under siege.
We remember the children whose eyes reflect the light of the future,
We remember the brave who say “no” to injustice,
We lift the olive branch which says “yes’ to a just peace

O God, we call upon you to grant us your patience, determination and power so that we may say:

No to hate and yes to love,
No to death and yes to life,
No to falsehood and yes to truth
No to oppression and yes to justice,
No to cruelty and yes to mercy,
No to violence and yes to the path of peace,
No, no matter what it may cost, and yes, no matter what it may cost.

For you are the source of love leading to reconciliation and forgiveness. Amen.

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