

MEDIA STATEMENT
SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
23 June 2017

**SACC CHURCH LEADERS VISIT PALESTINE ON JUBILEE (50th Anniversary) OF THE
ILLEGAL OCCUPATION OF PALESTINE**

A delegation of nine church leaders from the South African Council of Churches (SACC) visited Palestine to bring a message of Hope to the people of Palestine. The year 2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the illegal occupation by Israel, of Palestine and her people. The concept of jubilee “celebration” has been understood and interpreted throughout times in different ways. The biblical commandment, spelt out in Leviticus 25, and the Christian concept have both emphasized that the “jubilee” year is meant to be a Year of Return, restoring to the people that which has been taken away; and therefore a source for hope and benefit to all, if applied and lived today.

The delegation, led by SACC President, Bishop Zipho Siwa had prayerful visits to; the cities of Tel Aviv, Nazareth, Hebron, East Jerusalem and Bethlehem in Palestine, occupied by Israel since 1967, soaking the land and its people in prayer. Many of the Palestinians have only known the life in an illegally occupied country – Palestine - the country they call home. We as the church of Christ live in constant hope that this unlawful occupation of the Holy Land will be dealt with in a manner which is satisfying to the majority of the people of Palestine, and that Palestine and her people be set free. As the church, we look on at Palestine with great hope, as this Jubilee year so rightfully allows us to rejoice in the hope that Palestine will one day be free.

The delegation carried a message from the leaders of South African churches, endorsed by the recent SACC National Conference in which the church leaders say:

“Based on the information before us, it is clear that Israel is structured in a way that fits and even surpasses the description of an Apartheid State, which robs Palestinians of their citizenship and treats them in a discriminatory way. With our experience of Apartheid that the whole world recognized and condemned as a crime against humanity, we see the treatment of the Palestinians by Israel as worse than Apartheid. We are concerned that the world that condemned Apartheid has closed its eyes to the pain and suffering of Palestinians in the occupied areas. We decry the fact that the Palestinians have been occupied for fifty years now without any sign of an end to this occupation.

We strongly condemn this illegal and unjust occupation of the land of Palestine; the violation of your rights and human dignity; the destruction your sources of livelihoods and the demolition of your homes and properties. We reject the wall of division and separation that cuts through the homes and alienates Palestinian properties. We condemn most forcefully, the blockage of the Gaza strip turning the area into the largest prison in the world.

As we experienced Apartheid, we do not want another people, and definitely not those who live in the Holy Land, to have their humanity diminished because of external cultural and other factors. We affirm once again that in Christ there is neither Palestinian nor Israeli, and that you are one in Christ Jesus. Any system

that says and acts otherwise, we reject with all our might, and pray for the day when you will be completely equal in the Land that Christ chose to pitch his tent amongst us.

We are wondering if the ultimate answer is not a single non-racial and secular State where a person's race, ethnicity and faith have no determination of the human worth and citizenship of the individual, and where all can worship freely and appreciate the cultural diversity that enriches society.

We do understand that for many Jewish people all over the world, and certainly in Israel, there is a traditional narrative that sees Arab people as perpetual enemies; and that is forever suspicious, mistrustful and hateful of what they consider to be the historically hostile attitude of Christians towards the Jews. Many see Christian fervour and blame for the crucifixion of Jesus as the ideological genesis of the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust and its despicable industrial extermination of no less than 6 million Jews. Their justification of the unacceptable conduct of Israel is the "never again" response to historical Jewish discrimination and persecution. ...

We are encouraged that in the face of all that you have endured over decades, you have chosen to manifest in the best way you can, the gospel love that the first century Jewish Rabbi Jesus gave to you and to us. We urge you to continue to strengthen and grow the Christian community in Palestine and Israel and to allow the gospel of love to continue to penetrate for the sake of all in the Holy Land. We know that the way that we and other Christians understand and interpret certain texts in the Bible is key to your and our liberation - indeed the liberation of Christian theology!

...We remain hopeful, not because of our strength but because of Christ, that your oppression will not be permanent but that the love of God will turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, in Israel and Palestine and across the world, to move you from the darkness of oppression to the light of freedom."

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians he writes; "Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Father is a merciful God, who always gives us comfort. He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share that same comfort with others in trouble" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). *Our Palestinian sisters and brothers are in need of comfort, let us, the people of God Praise Him and offer His people more than just comfort. Let us offer them the love and support which our Heavenly Father has ordained for us to do.*

ENDS.

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