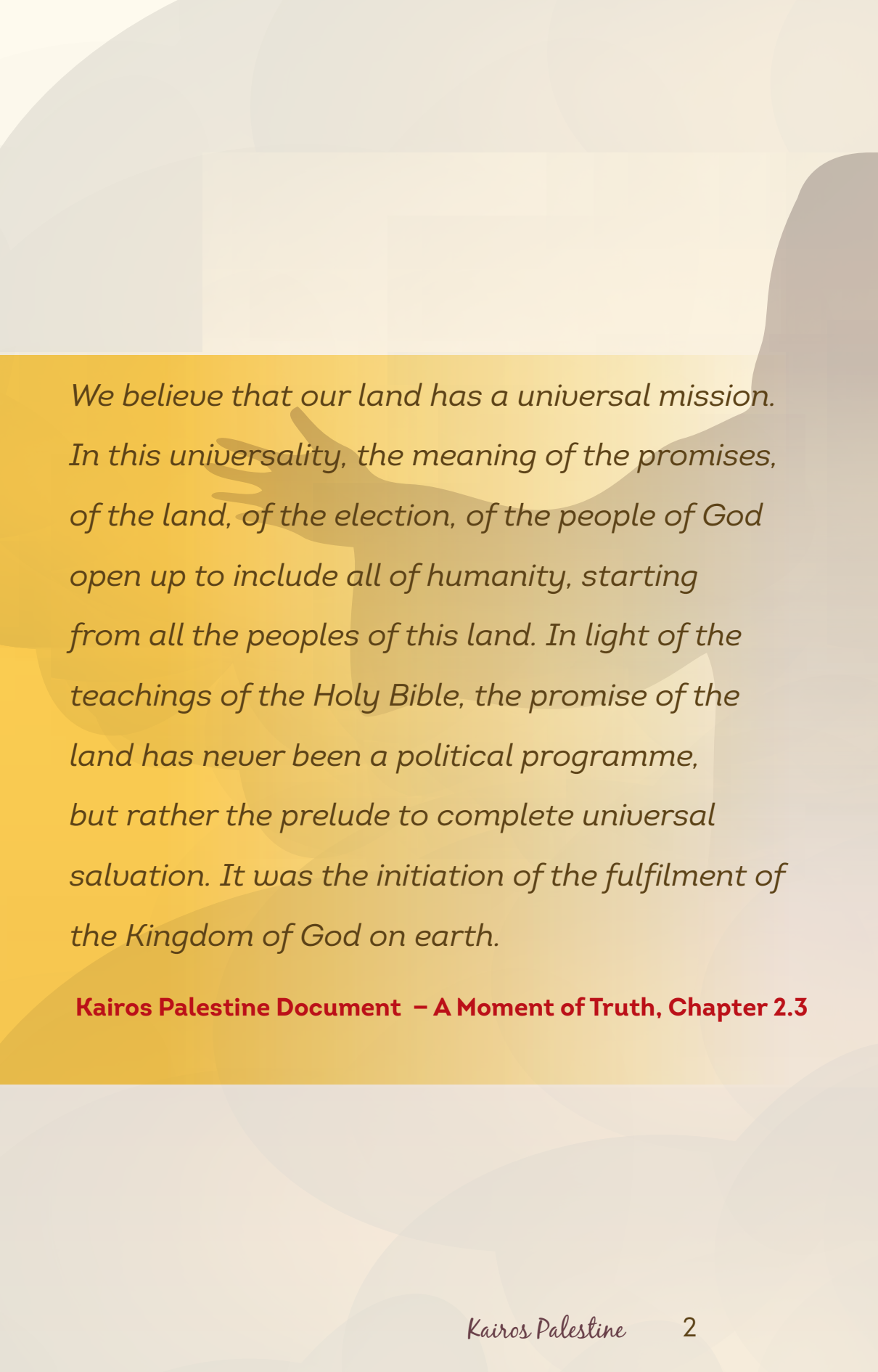




Easter Alert 2023

The background features a light beige and cream color palette with large, soft-edged abstract shapes. A prominent silhouette of a hand, palm facing up, is centered behind the text. The text is in a dark brown, elegant serif font, arranged in a single paragraph.

We believe that our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land. In light of the teachings of the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political programme, but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. It was the initiation of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Kairos Palestine Document – A Moment of Truth, Chapter 2.3

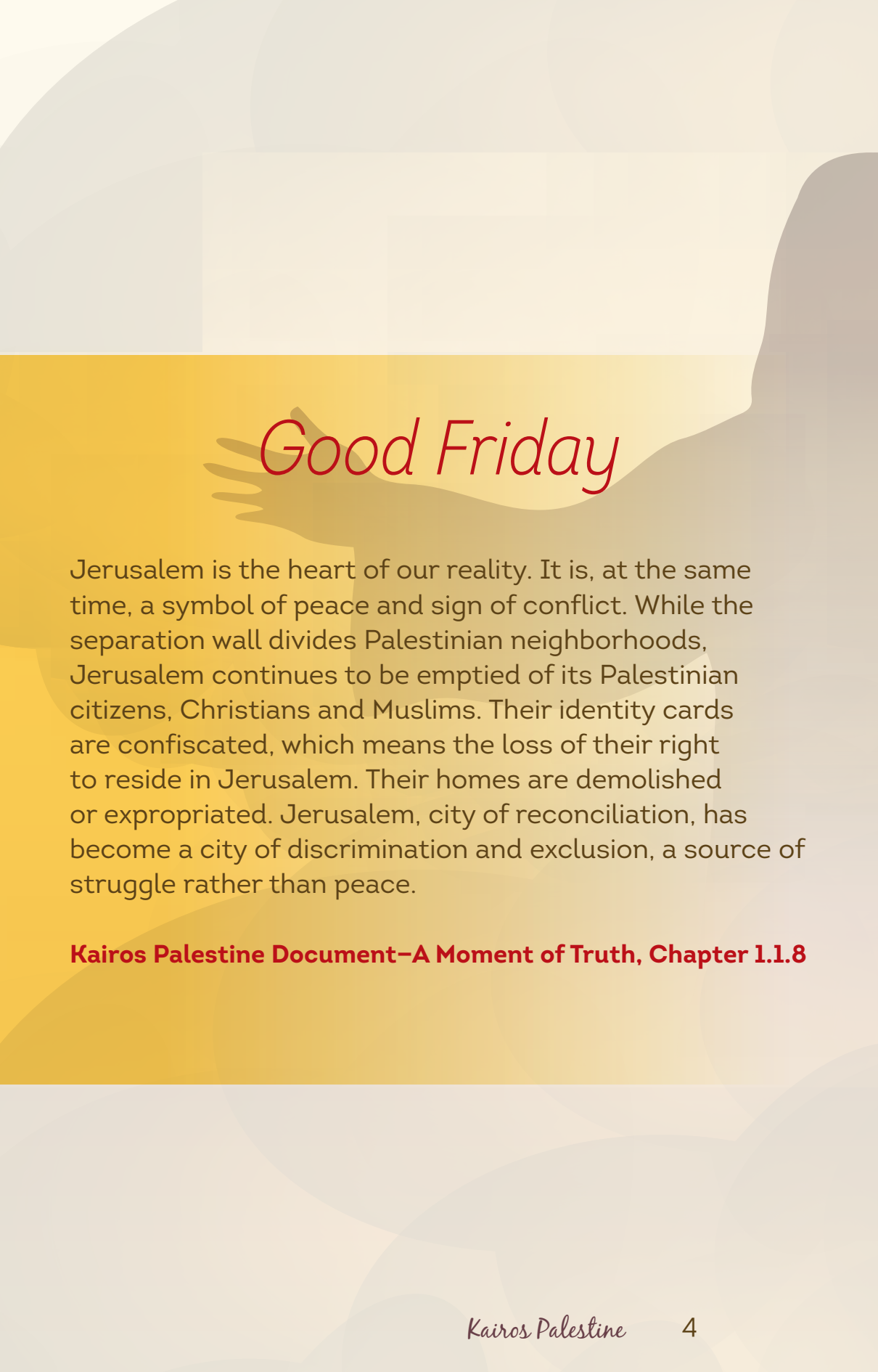
Foreward

This year's Easter Alert invites us to take time each day to reflect on the suffering, the hope and the anticipation of our Palestinian sisters and brothers as they continue to experience a brutal occupation that is considered by human rights organizations and others as apartheid and ethnic cleansing.

Our readings will explore the means through which the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime has created the coercive environment that forces Palestinians to leave their homes and communities. We will use as our resource, portions of a document that is being jointly prepared by Kairos Palestine and Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights (www.badil.org), to be released through a global webinar in May 2023.

The catastrophe for Palestinians and Palestinian Christians did not end with the Nakba (catastrophe) in 1948. The Nakba is ongoing and continues today. Seventy-five years after the beginning of Israel's Zionist settler-colonial project, it is becoming even further entrenched through a matrix of laws and policies that facilitate the colonization of Palestine and amount to forcible transfer of Palestinians in direct contravention of international law.

We ask you to read this Alert, reflect on it and share it with your congregations, regions, conferences, presbyteries, and dioceses across your country as a way to educate your community about the suffering of your Palestinian family living under Israeli occupation.



Good Friday

Jerusalem is the heart of our reality. It is, at the same time, a symbol of peace and sign of conflict. While the separation wall divides Palestinian neighborhoods, Jerusalem continues to be emptied of its Palestinian citizens, Christians and Muslims. Their identity cards are confiscated, which means the loss of their right to reside in Jerusalem. Their homes are demolished or expropriated. Jerusalem, city of reconciliation, has become a city of discrimination and exclusion, a source of struggle rather than peace.

Kairos Palestine Document—A Moment of Truth, Chapter 1.1.8

Forced population transfer policies deployed by the Israeli Regime

- ***From the coming report of BADIL and Kairos Palestine on:***

The land of Palestine is the cradle of Christianity. Over the centuries, it has been called the “Fifth Gospel” - its geographical features lending context and revealing deeper insight to the texts of the four Gospels. As BADIL and Kairos Palestine remind us, the history of the land is one of invasions, empires, colonization and military occupations. Through it all, Palestinian Christians have survived turmoil, oppression, and injustice. But their numbers now stand at less than two percent of the population of Mandatory Palestine. Evidently, the creation of the state of Israel and its simultaneous crimes of forcible displacement and transfer have left a heavy mark on the percentage of Palestinian Christians in the land. In a series of working papers on forced population transfer, BADIL identified seven policies that the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime deploys against Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line (OR throughout all of Mandatory Palestine) and in exile: denial of residency; land confiscation and denial of use, discriminatory zoning and planning; denial of access to natural resources and services; imposition of a permit regime; fragmentation, segregation and isolation; denial of reparations; and suppression of resistance.



- ***Denial of Residency:***

...Citizenship and residency statuses for Palestinian are defined and constrained by Israeli-drawn geographies and laws. Through categorizations that divide the population between Palestinians with Israeli citizenships, Palestinian permanent residents of East Jerusalem, Palestinians with West Bank IDs, and Palestinians with Gaza Strip IDs, the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime restricts not only where Palestinians can live but also controls their freedom of movement and access to education, employment and healthcare, among other services. Furthermore, Palestinians in exile do not possess any right to residency in the territory of Mandate Palestine and cannot even visit the area. Israeli control is further cemented in its ability to revoke the citizenship

of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and the residency of Palestinian permanent residents of East Jerusalem, as well as its ability to deny family reunification. The discriminatory legislative frameworks enacted by Israel to regulate residency for Palestinians act as tools of Israeli colonization and amount to forced population transfer. These laws, policies and practices create a coercive environment by permanently disrupting and, in many cases, completely severing the development of social and economic ties in Palestinian communities. Social development is a cornerstone for exercising the right to self-determination, but Israeli residency policies deliberately render hollow—if not completely impossible—any realization of this right.

- ***Land and Planning***

...Land confiscation and denial of use have been and continue to be central tools the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime utilizes to control the maximum territory while minimizing the number of Palestinians in said territory. Palestinian dispossession was, and continues to be, executed initially through the use of force but has since been cemented through the promulgation of laws and military orders throughout all of Mandatory Palestine. For example, Israel's colonial appropriation of land in and around Jerusalem and Bethlehem for colonies, the Apartheid Wall, and checkpoints has divided the two holy cities and their residents, often separating family members from each other. This is particularly devastating for Palestinian Christians given that the majority of West Bank Christians live in the Bethlehem area and now; many have lost the land of their ancestors. In fact, thousands of dunams of land formerly part of Bethlehem, Beit

Sahour, and Beit Jala have been annexed and confiscated for the nearby colonies of Gilo, Har Homa, and Giv'at Hamatos. Today, Christians in Bethlehem are suffering from shrinking physical space in addition to their isolation being isolated from Jerusalem.

Through its extensive seizure of Palestinian land and strict regulation of development on the land Palestinians still possess, and given that land is essential for the growth of any community, Israel is violating the Palestinian right to self-determination.

- ***Doing Resurrection:***

Become informed: In Kairos Palestine's A Dossier on Israeli Apartheid (kairospalestine.ps), learn about the three features of apartheid under international law.

Act: Enjoin someone in conversation, discussing what Israel's colonial policies and practices have in common with the colonial policies and practices that established the United States and/or are in place in other parts of the world.

A prayer on Good Friday

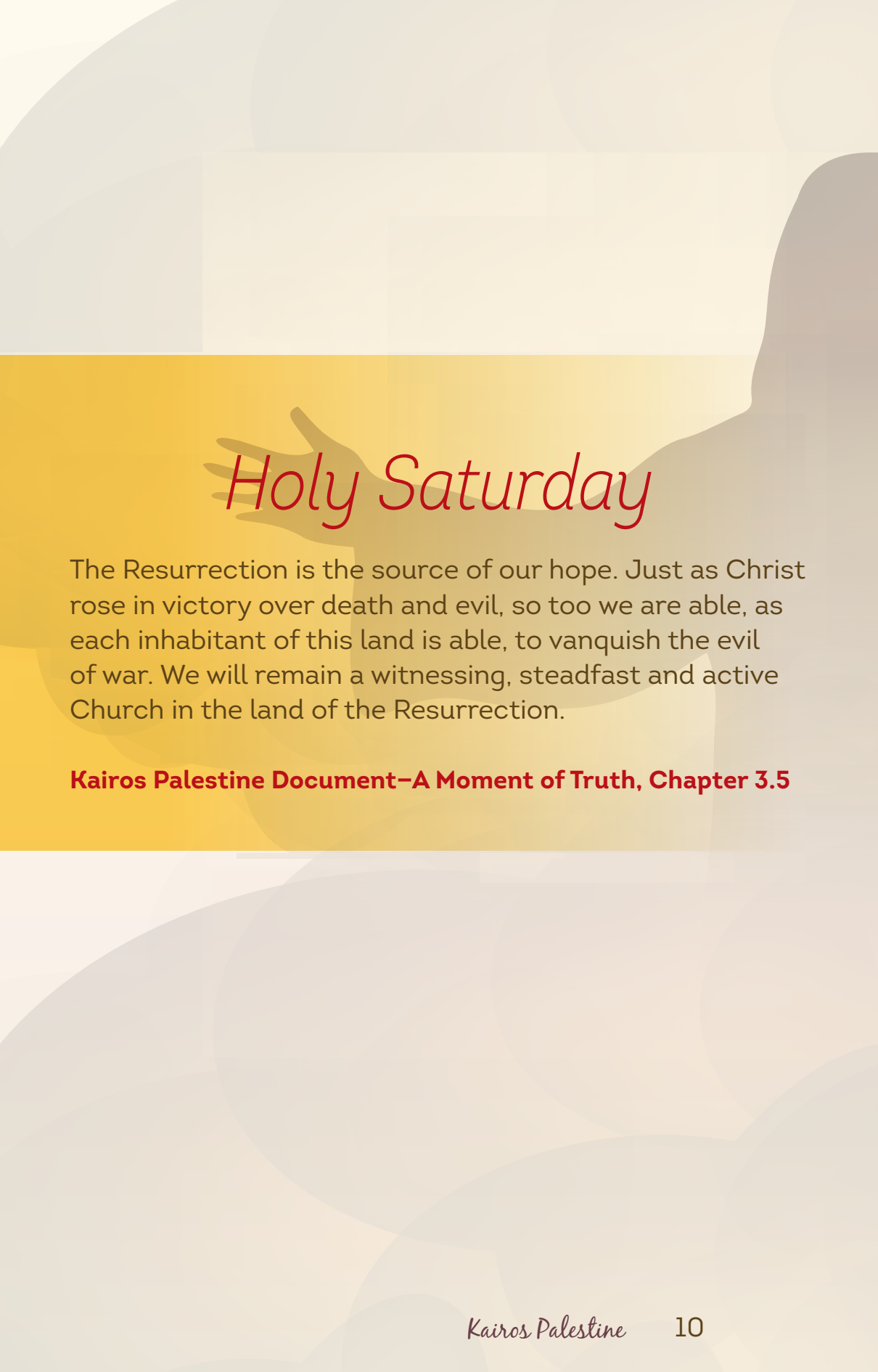
by Marah Sarji

Our creator in heaven, who is present with us today, blessed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done in Palestine as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread and provide us safety of our bodies and souls. Forgive us our debts and apathy for the livelihood of our oppressed sisters and brothers, as we forgive those who sin against us in courageous love.

Lead us not into the temptation of self-recognition and wealth accumulation but deliver us from the evil hearts and deeds of oppressors who persecute your worshipers during this holy month. Give us the strength and humility to carry our cross as your body on earth to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly. As we are reminded of salvation through your life on earth, resurrect our faith so we can love our neighbor as ourselves.

Marah Sarji is a Christian Palestinian, born and raised in Nazareth. On a mission to mobilize Palestinian youth, Marah is active in various movements to encourage critical thinking and active work towards envisioning a just future in the land. She is interested in bringing her faith and passion for justice together through her career, with an emphasis on the experiences and theology of women in Palestine.



Holy Saturday

The Resurrection is the source of our hope. Just as Christ rose in victory over death and evil, so too we are able, as each inhabitant of this land is able, to vanquish the evil of war. We will remain a witnessing, steadfast and active Church in the land of the Resurrection.

Kairos Palestine Document—A Moment of Truth, Chapter 3.5

Forced population transfer policies deployed by the Israeli Regime

- ***From the coming report of BADIL and Kairos Palestine on***

As BADIL and Kairos Palestine tell us in their study, "Apartheid on its own, is an insufficient framework to scrutinize the realities Palestinians face, as it is only a manifestation of the colonial agenda followed by Israel since its creation. Indeed, without acknowledging the colonial nature of Zionism and the Israeli regime, we fail to account for the domination of a people, the Palestinians, and their land, through the implantation of a settler community, and the ongoing denial of the internationally recognized right to self-determination of Palestinians on their land. Accordingly, apartheid is just one tool, albeit a significant and central one, of the Zionist settler-colonial project in Mandatory Palestine."

- ***Denial of Access to Natural Resources and Services:***

Israel's physical control over the [Palestinian] territory extends beyond its seizure of land and includes the exploitation of natural resources on both sides of the Green Line (OR throughout all of Mandatory Palestine... such as water from its aquifers, natural gas in the Mediterranean Sea off Gaza's coast, minerals from

the Dead Sea, and marble from quarries in the West Bank.... The dearth of resources, including water and electricity, directly affects the provision and quality of social services, such as healthcare and education, for Palestinians. This can be seen starkly, for example, in the Gaza Strip, where hospitals cannot utilize specific machines to care for certain patients due to insufficient electricity.

Limited access to, and in some instances a complete lack of resources and services have profound consequences for Palestinians' welfare and safety as well as the economic and social development of Palestinian society.

The effects of such policies and practices, which create a coercive environment prompting many to leave their homes, are not limited to individual well-being but extend to the Palestinian collective, triggering de-development and violating the Palestinian right to self-determination.

- ***The Permit Regime:***

Imagine living in Bethlehem, a short bike ride from Jerusalem, yet not being able to visit or pray in Jerusalem... this is not an imaginary situation.

...Many ancient Christian traditions are affected by this [permit] enforcement of separation. This is particularly true for the annual procession of Palm Sunday... as Palestinian Christians wishing to participate in this procession depend entirely on being granted a permit by the Israeli colonial authorities, a difficult if not impossible task. The same applies to the Holy Saturday celebration in the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Not only are Palestinian Christians prevented from being

in Jerusalem on that day, but even those who live in Jerusalem are prohibited from going to the church itself, and in some instances have been attacked and assaulted by the Israeli army.

... There are approximately 100 types of permits that regulate and interfere with various facets of Palestinian life, including permits to work in Israeli colonies, to visit holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, to visit family, to access health services and to use agricultural equipment....

The permit regime creates a coercive environment for Palestinians by rendering routine activities intrusive, which is humiliating and time-consuming in its least



restrictive form and, unbearable at its most. This control over granting and withholding of permits illustrates the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime's ability to strangle Palestinian political, economic, social, and cultural development and thereby the Palestinian right to self-determination. In contrast, Jewish Israelis can move freely across both sides of the Green Line.

- ***Fragmentation, Segregation, and Isolation:***

Fragmentation, segregation, and isolation of both Palestinians and their land form the foundational logic of the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime. Whether through the implementation of citizenship and residency legislation, allocation of permits, or the construction of infrastructure, such as road networks, checkpoints, and walls, Israel's policy aims are clear: to fragment the territory and destroy Palestinian collective unity and national consciousness, thereby eliminating the Palestinian right to self-determination and return.

- ***Doing Resurrection:***

Become informed: Whether it has been a while since—or you have never—read Kairos Palestine's defining document released in 2009, *A Moment of Truth: faith, hope, and love* (www.kairospalestine.ps), “taste and eat” the profoundly theological/Biblical reflection.

Act: Lead a study of *A Moment of Truth* in your faith community and/or with your circle of friends.

Prayer for Holy Saturday

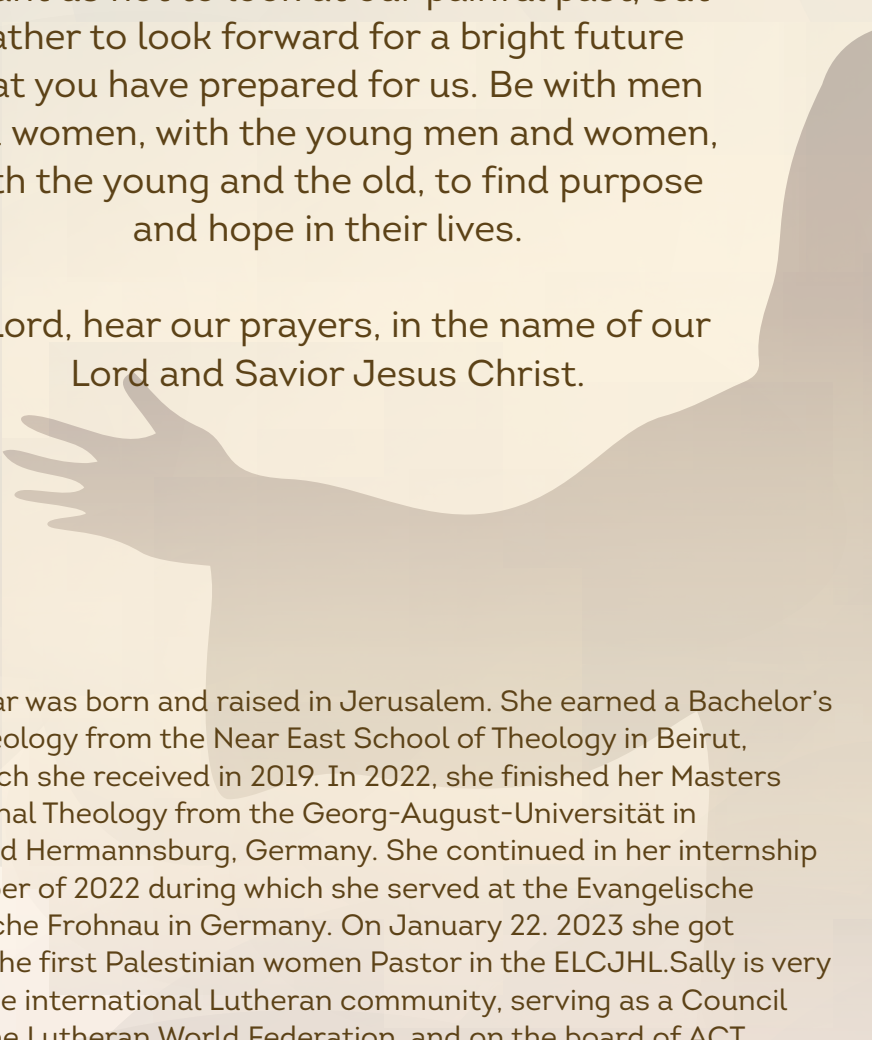
by Rev. Sally Azar

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

We lift our prayers to you, our Lord, for the whole world. You see and hear of the hardships that the human suffers from his human brother.

We ask you, Lord, to look at every sufferer with mercy and love. On this day, we especially pray for our Palestinian people, Christians and Muslims. We are still searching for stability and peace, for justice and freedom. The human looks at himself more than looking at the other. O Lord, you always look at us as equals. You do not differentiate between rich and poor, between nationalities, or people.

Grant us, O Lord, to look into the future with hope.



Grant us not to look at our painful past, but rather to look forward for a bright future that you have prepared for us. Be with men and women, with the young men and women, with the young and the old, to find purpose and hope in their lives.

O Lord, hear our prayers, in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Rev. Sally Azar was born and raised in Jerusalem. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Theology from the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon, which she received in 2019. In 2022, she finished her Masters of International Theology from the Georg-August-Universität in Göttingen and Hermannsburg, Germany. She continued in her internship until December of 2022 during which she served at the Evangelische Johanneskirche Frohnau in Germany. On January 22, 2023 she got ordained as the first Palestinian women Pastor in the ELCJHL. Sally is very involved in the international Lutheran community, serving as a Council Member of the Lutheran World Federation, and on the board of ACT Alliance.

Easter Sunday

Jesus Christ said: “The Kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:21). This Kingdom that is present among us and in us is the extension of the mystery of salvation. It is the presence of God among us and our sense of that presence in everything we do and say. It is in this divine presence that we shall do what we can until justice is achieved in this land.

Kairos Palestine document – Moment of Truth Chapter 3.4.4

Forced population transfer policies deployed by the Israeli Regime

- ***From the coming report of BADIL and Kairos Palestine:***

Because mainstream media generally reflects the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime's narrative regarding unfolding events, we seldom hear about the frequent attacks on and incitements against Christian clergy and holy sites. Recent examples include: (1) a settler organization took over property owned by the Greek Orthodox Church and rented to a Jerusalem tenant; (2) police allowed settlers to storm Jerusalem's St. Joseph's hospital during the funeral of assassinated Christian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh; (3) Jerusalem's municipality is attempting to take over church land on Mount of Olives; (4) the takeover by settlers of the Greek Orthodox-owned Little Petra Hotel just inside Jaffa Gate; (5) settlers vandalized the Mt. Zion's Protestant cemetery, breaking crosses, toppling headstones, destroying iconography. Christian clergy lament the emigration of Christians and their Muslim neighbors. These incidents—along with the previous five and these last two policies of Israel's colonial-apartheid regime—help us understand why so many Palestinians leave their beloved land in search of a better life for their families as a result of the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime's suffocating and genocidal policies.

• ***Denial of Reparations:***

To this day, the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime has denied the Palestinian people reparations in all forms – return, restitution, and compensation– primarily through the adoption of racist, colonial laws. Indeed, the denial of reparations is a core tenant of Israeli colonial rule; the colonial-apartheid regime was founded on and is maintained by the goal to manufacture an engineered Jewish majority in Palestine, and fundamental to this goal is the forcible displacement of Palestinians and the subsequent denial of their right to return. This discriminatory legal landscape is compounded by a lack of political will from the international actors community and actors, despite their being bound by international law to hold Israel accountable for its wrongful acts.

...One of the obvious examples is the case of the Palestinian Christian village Iqrit. The village was captured by the Zionists during the 1948 War, and all its Christian residents were forcibly displaced. Those residents were displaced to what later became Israel (or 1948 Palestine), tried to return to their village, even winning a court appeal in the Israeli supreme court, only to have their village demolished in 1951. The church in the village survived the destruction, and Iqrit people, to this day, continue to visit the village and the church. While they continue a tradition of burying their dead in its cemetery and holding prayers and being wed in their once lively church, they are not allowed to rebuild and populate their village.

- ***Suppression of Resistance:***

Israel attempts to eliminate opposition to its racist policies and thereby further entrench its colonial-apartheid regime through the silencing of Palestinian resistance under the illegitimate cover of “self-defense” and “counterterrorism.” The colonial-apartheid regime deploys multiple tactics in its efforts to crush the Palestinian struggle for liberation, including targeted and extrajudicial killings, imprisonment and torture, as well as censorship and criminalization of Palestinian civil society. ...For example, Israel frequently enforces closures and curfews on entire localities and revokes permits of relatives and other community members as a response to acts of Palestinian resistance. These policies amount to collective punishment, which is prohibited under international law.



Photo credit: Al-Haq Organization, <https://www.alhaq.org/>

...This suppression extends to nonviolent resistance, or what Kairos Palestine has called “creative resistance.” An example of this can be seen in Israel’s persistent attacks on Palestinian civil society organizations, both within Mandatory Palestine and abroad, as exemplified by the recently well-publicized attacks on six Palestinian civil society organizations; in many of these cases Palestinian Christians are targeted because of their affiliation with these organizations.

- ***Doing Resurrection:***

Become informed: Follow alternative media for news and updates out of Palestine and Israel, such as Middle East Eye, +972 Magazine, Mondoweiss, This Week in Palestine, and others.

Act: Join in the economic, academic, and/or performance of boycotts of Israel.

A Prayer for Resurrection *by Patriarch* *Michel Sabbah*

God, we have walked in the path of repentance, fasting and prayer, and come to be with You in the Holy Week.

On Maundy Thursday, we celebrated your commandment to us before your death, the new commandment of love.

On Good Friday, we lived the mystery of your terrible death. You are the Creator of the universe. You condescended and allowed man, your creature, to be the master and condemn you to death. You said to him: "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." (Jn 19:11). And you submitted to your creature, because your hour had come to fulfill the will of the Father and, to give us new life, through your death.

On Holy Saturday, we wanted to rejoice in your joyful light. We wanted to see your light, Lord, in the Church of the Resurrection, but the military blocked us, imposed their barriers, and impeded many of us from reaching your light.

God, we pray to you, who see our situation. Today we are in the place of your Resurrection, your light and your glory. We pray where you prayed, and we want to welcome the gift of your universal love for all.

Today we are threatened, in our prayers, in our freedom, and in our existence.

God, in Jerusalem, man and Holy Places are attacked. Our residence in the city of Redemption and Resurrection is under threat. Houses are demolished, and from other houses their inhabitants are evicted, to give the house to others, strangers...

God, in Jerusalem and in all the Holy Land around it, you came to give life to all without exception or discrimination.

Today, the same land that you sanctified with your presence, your teaching, your suffering, death and Resurrection, the same land is witnessing the human being attacking and killing his brother. The human being is depriving himself from his humanity, by depriving his brothers from their lives.

In all the cities and villages of Palestine, we see death reaching people in their homes. Homes are destroyed. People are attacked in their daily lives. Thousands of political prisoners are suffering, deprived of their freedom and dignity.

Those who do not want us in our homes, tell
us that we do not exist.

And all of us, we who are assaulted, and
those who assault us, all of us, we are the
human being you came to redeem. But our
aggressors still choose the old ways of
death.

We suffer, we raise our eyes to you, and say:
O Lord, have mercy on us and have mercy on
them.

God, see and have mercy.

You suffered, so that we may no more
suffer, but the rulers of Jerusalem today
still impose upon us new sufferings, and
oppression.

Lord, have mercy. Change the hearts of
the aggressors, give them to see that they
are brothers, that you created them to be
brothers, not to carry the weapons of death.
Stop them on the path of death, put them on
the path of life, so we too may live and the
whole earth will live through you.

God, we are asking man, the rulers of
Jerusalem today, what you have given us,
life, freedom and dignity. We ask to remain in
our homes and our land, we ask to exist.

God, we ask you, too, because men have
become incapable of justice.

“Hear my cry for help, my King and my God,
for to you I pray”
(Psalm 5:2)

+ Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah served as the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem from 1988-2008. He served the parish and the Palestinian nation locally and internationally. He is the president of the Palestinian Christian Initiative, Kairos Palestine, and one of the authors of the Kairos Palestine document, “A Moment of Truth.”. He currently works in the field of interfaith dialogue and believes in pluralism, equality and preserving human dignity.



Embodying Resurrection

Those of us in the international community—especially those of us in the Church—are called to support the Christian community that birthed and bears still the Good News of God’s love for all of humanity. It is not only our right but our duty and responsibility to stand with all Palestinians in the face of the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime’s brutality. Furthermore, it is crucial for us to remember and emphasize that Israel’s treatment of all Palestinians, Christian or otherwise, and all of the aforementioned Israeli policies are enacted within the specific strategy to further to colonization of Palestine, to facilitate the theft and appropriation of the land, to eliminate the existence of its people.

Observe the Cry for Hope: A Call to Decisive Action (www.cryforhope.org) released in 2020 by Kairos Palestine and Global Kairos for Justice:

- Initiate processes at local, denominational and ecumenical levels that recognize the present kairos and the urgent requirement for decisive action regarding the denial of Palestinian rights and the misuse of the Bible.
- Affirm the Palestinian people’s right to resist, by all available means, Israeli Apartheid and military occupation, dispossession, and abrogation of their fundamental rights, and join the Palestinians in their creative and nonviolent resistance.
- Demand also that governments and world bodies

adhere to their legal obligations and employ political, diplomatic and economic means to stop Israel's violations of human rights and international law.

- Oppose anti-Semitism by working for justice against anti-Judaism, racism and xenophobia; oppose the equating of criticism of Israel's unjust actions with anti-Semitism.
- Come and see the reality in the Holy Land of Palestine with compassionate eyes for the suffering of Palestinians and stand in solidarity with grassroots initiatives on the part of all faiths and secular groups who challenge the Israeli colonial-apartheid regime and who work for a just, decolonial peace.

