

MIDDLE EAST

Social Policy Resolution
CA93.08.98



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Adopted by the 1993 Churchwide Assembly.

Whereas

Whereas, the following declaration on "Christians in the Holy Land" was unanimously adopted in May 1993 by an 18-member delegation from Jerusalem, including representatives of the Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Latin Catholic patriarchates, the Anglican church, the Middle East Council of Churches, International Christian Committee of Israel, and the Society of Friends, in addition to the Lutheran Church:

We are conscious of the privilege of living, and keeping alive the Christian faith where the church was born;

The Christian community in the land of Jesus (the Living Stones, 1 Peter 2:5), has witnessed to our Lord in the midst of all the changing social, religious, and political conditions over a period of two millennia;

We reaffirm our responsibility and constant determination on behalf of Christians through the world to safeguard our sacred heritage, along with that of Muslims and Jews;

While we, in the main, are an Arab Palestinian Christian community, we treasure in our midst the presence of members of our churches from a great variety of nations;

We are saddened by the ongoing reduction of the indigenous Christians in the land of Jesus, which requires urgent attention;

We deplore the lack of access for Palestinians from the Occupied Territories in the Holy City of Jerusalem, and urge that free access to it be guaranteed for all peoples at all times;

We urge our Christian Palestinian sisters and brothers to stand firm in their ancestral home in the land of Jesus. We expect all Palestinians who have emigrated, or were forced to leave, to come back. We request all relevant bodies to assist in their return;

We have always welcomed the constant flow of Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land from all over the world and we encourage them to meet and pray with the Living Stones;

As the church living in a broadly Arab and Muslim culture in the Middle East, we witness to our Christian faith in dialogue with our sisters and brothers of the Muslim

and Jewish faiths;

We share the aspirations of the Palestinian people for an end to occupation and for national independence. We therefore advocate and support a just and lasting peace in the region;

We call on the international community to respect and protect the unique historic nature of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and all the Holy Land, as being sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims; and

Whereas, the following statement on "Crisis in the West Bank and Gaza" was published in The Washington Post on August 10, 1993, by 11 agencies from the U.S.A., including all major agencies at work in the Middle East for Protestant and Orthodox churches:

In a world filled with cases of human distress, few merit more attention than the suffering of nearly two million Palestinians. The forced closure of the West Bank and Gaza homeland is destroying the Palestinian economy and disrupting all Palestinian life. Something must be done to end the havoc caused by the new occupation measures;

The closure Israel imposed in March has effectively sealed off the Palestinian lands and carved them up into four zones: the northern West Bank, the southern West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Passage in Israel is restricted by army checkpoints on all main roads and entry points; movement through Jerusalem to any of the zones between the West Bank and Gaza is denied to all but a few Palestinians.

The impact of the restrictions on Palestinian daily life is punishing. They prohibit, among other things, access to jobs, visits to medical clinics, shipment of goods and agricultural produce, worship in Jerusalem mosques and churches, and attendance at cultural events.

Before the restrictions, the stunted Palestinian economy generated only 1,000 new jobs a year; the annual labor force increase was 15,000. With their imposition, Palestinians were severed from most of the 130,000 day-labor jobs they once had in Israel — jobs that produced one-third of the West Bank's income and one-half for the Gaza Strip;

Palestinian agriculture, industry, and transportation are barred now from primary markets and sources of supply. The rules stifle normal communication between the southern and northern West Bank and between Gaza and the West Bank.

The East Jerusalem market is isolated from the three other zones and transit to any one of them through East Jerusalem is forbidden. As a result, gluts and shortages of scarce produce regularly occur; In the international community, the measures are condemned widely as collective punishment, which is illegal under the Fourth

Geneva Convention — the document that defines acceptable occupier conduct. Some critics consider Israel's positive practice a substantial new burden that hinders progress in the peace process and intensifies the sense of oppression among Palestinians living in their 27th year under military law and army rule;

Our concern as humanitarian organizations is the welfare of people. In human terms, we regard the closure as unacceptable and call for the immediate lifting; and

Whereas, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has missionaries in Jerusalem, as well as elsewhere in the Middle East, and has supported the work of the Lutheran World Federation and other agencies on behalf of Palestinian refugees for over 40 years; and

Whereas, the 1989 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirmed a message on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict adopted by the Church Council on April 16, 1989 (the message urges self-determination and possible independence for Palestinians and security for Israel); therefore, be it

Resolved

RESOLVED, that the 1993 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirm in principle the "Declaration on Christians in the Holy Land" and "Crisis in the West Bank and Gaza," as cited above; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Reverend Herbert W. Chilstrom, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, be requested to communicate this action, together with the sympathetic concern, of the assembly to the Lutheran bishop in Jerusalem and to the ELCA missionaries and Lutheran World Federation staff there; and be it further

RESOLVED, that Bishop Herbert W. Chilstrom be requested to communicate with the parties involved in peace talks to offer our prayers and concern for a peace settlement that guarantees Israel's right to exist and the establishment of a Palestinian state; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Division for Church in Society, in cooperation with other appropriate units of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, consider the two statements quoted above for inclusion among this church's study materials on the Middle East and for use in advocacy for peace and justice in the Middle East.