



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

November 19, 2019

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is very disturbed by the November 18 announcement by Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo that the Administration unwisely is changing current U.S. policy by stating that the “establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not per se inconsistent with international law.”

Our church has consistently called for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, the cessation of all settlement activities and withdrawal from settlements on Palestinian territory to the 1967 boundaries, a negotiated, final status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians and the establishment of and international support for a viable, contiguous Palestinian state. We will continue to work with ecumenical and inter-religious partners who share these commitments. In the long term, we wish to see Israelis and Palestinians co-existing in justice and peace, as citizens of viable and secure Israeli and Palestinian states.

The Administration’s announcement makes the realization of these outcomes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more difficult and distant, rather than advancing the cause of peace. The announcement, like earlier ones on the conflict, gives no evidence of having been developed in consultation with those who will be most adversely affected by this policy, namely the Palestinians in the occupied territory. Instead, it will give a “green light” to further settlement activity and a worsening of the conditions of occupation, including intensified military and police measures and the further diversion of natural and other resources that benefit only settlers.

By reverting to the policy of the Reagan Administration, the new policy ignores facts that have been created on the ground since 1989 (from a settler population then of close to 200,000 to an estimated more than 700,000 at present in the West Bank and East Jerusalem). It also discredits international law such as various provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention -- to which Israel is a party -- about the obligations of an occupying power as well as the prevailing international consensus about settlements, most recently articulated in Security Council resolution 2334 of 2016 (to which all UN member states are bound according to the UN Charter).

Our distress with this announcement is primarily its impact on the daily life of Palestinians, especially our sisters and brothers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, but also their Christian and Muslim neighbors. We are also concerned with policy changes that further distance the United States from the prevailing international consensus on the path toward a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including respecting human rights standards and international law.

God’s peace,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
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