

The Two Hundred and Second 'Aha Pae'āina of the Hawai'i Conference of the United Church of Christ
A Call to Education and Action Regarding the Crisis in Gaza – Approved by the 202nd 'Aha Pae'āina

SUMMARY

This resolution calls on the Hawai'i Conference of the United Church of Christ (HCUCC) and its member churches to engage in meaningful action to address the need for education and action regarding the crisis in Gaza. Each church is called to pursue a course of action that best fits their skills, capabilities, and understanding. Actions that seek to respond to the crisis include but are not limited to: participating in raising awareness and fostering education concerning the history of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, praying for peace, organizing/attending peaceful protests, and/or advocating for legislative action concerning a ceasefire, humanitarian and permanent, as well as the allowance of desperately needed aid in the form of food and medical supplies.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

The Israel-Palestine conflict traces its origins to the late 19th century when the Zionist movement, advocating for a Jewish homeland, gained momentum in Europe. Amidst the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the British mandate over Palestine and the Balfour Declaration further fueled tensions between Jewish and Arab communities¹. The United Nations' partition plan in 1947 aimed to establish separate Jewish and Arab states, leading to the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948, sparking the Arab-Israeli War². This war resulted in significant displacement of Palestinian Arabs. Subsequent conflicts, including the 1967 Six-Day War, further shaped the region's dynamics, with Israel occupying the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and Sinai Peninsula³. The Oslo Accords in 1993 offered hope for peace, but the process was marred by periods of violence, including the Second Intifada⁴. The Second Intifada was a response from the Palestinians after Ariel Sharon (the Prime Minister of Israel at the time) visited the Al-Aqsa complex, situated on the Temple Mount, in order to promote Israeli sovereignty over the site⁵. This led to mass protests of Palestinians who felt threatened by this territory infringement, which led to countless deaths on both sides of the conflict.⁶

Ongoing disputes over territory, settlements, and the status of Jerusalem persist, exacerbating the longstanding conflict. Diplomatic efforts and peace initiatives continue, but the Israel-Palestine conflict remains a complex and deeply rooted challenge, entwined with historical grievances, national aspirations, and geopolitical complexities. The current conflict in Gaza is the bloodiest in the history of this situation⁷ and deserves the attention of Christians worldwide in prayer, education, and committed action for a just peace.

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Balfour-Declaration>

² [https://www.un.org/unispal/history/#:~:text=In%201947%2C%20the%20UK%20turned,Read%20more.&text=After%20looking%20at%20alternatives%2C%20the,\(II\)%20of%201947](https://www.un.org/unispal/history/#:~:text=In%201947%2C%20the%20UK%20turned,Read%20more.&text=After%20looking%20at%20alternatives%2C%20the,(II)%20of%201947).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Israel/The-second-intifada>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/more-than-29000-palestinians-have-been-killed-in-gaza-since-wars-start-health-ministry-says>

A Theological Imperative for Peacemaking in the Israel-Palestine Conflict: Embracing a Vision of God's Inclusive Kingdom

In the Hawai'i Conference of the United Church of Christ, we are called to engage with theological depth and Christian compassion in response to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Grounded in biblical narratives and the teachings of Jesus, our theological understanding should guide us towards actively seeking education that compels us to support a permanent ceasefire and advocating for a mutually beneficial resolution to the land question, in which Palestinians have a say, benefiting both Israelis and Palestinians.

1. A Holy Land Perspective: Who does it Belong to in the Bible?

The biblical narrative in Joshua 6 and Deuteronomy 34 underscores the sacredness of the land for the Israelites. However, we must acknowledge that the Holy Land's biblical background was marked by tribal dynamics rather than resembling modern nation-states.

Biblical references reveal the longstanding presence of the Philistines (Palestinians) on the Holy Land, emphasizing a tribal context rather than a delineation of modern political boundaries. Understanding this historical backdrop is crucial for a nuanced perspective. The Philistines are mentioned as natives of the land of Canaan in multiple places in Genesis, Exodus, Judges, 1 Kings, and 1 and 2 Samuel.

2. Jesus' Teaching on Ethno-Religious Identity: "Give to Caesar What Is Caesar's"

In Matthew 22, the Pharisees approached Jesus with the intent of tricking him into expressing his desire and intent to overthrow the Roman occupiers. Jesus understood that not only were his people no match for Rome, but also ownership of the land was not his priority or call. Instead, he advocated for a new way of understanding the people's relationship to God, which was not land-based, but Spirit-based.

Jesus' words, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21) signal this new way of thinking, different from the traditional theological ethno-state. This biblical foundation encourages us to transcend narrow nationalistic perspectives.

Instead, Jesus consistently alluded to the fall of Jerusalem and spoke of a new age where all people, both gentiles and Jews, would live together harmoniously under God's guidance. This vision transcends ethnic boundaries and sets the stage for a unified and inclusive Holy Land. This was one of Jesus' main topics of discussion and is referenced in abundance throughout the Gospels.

Jesus repeatedly emphasized that the Kingdom of Heaven is characterized by inclusion, justice, and a place where people from all backgrounds find love, acceptance, and "home." This vision should guide our understanding of the Holy Land's future. This vision of peace and acceptance is not possible during an ongoing war that has claimed tens of thousands of innocent lives, mostly of Palestinian women and children.

3. Harmony and Unity: God's Kingdom Beyond Ethnicity

The culmination of our theological argument rests on the belief that God's Kingdom, both in the Holy Land and beyond, is greater than any individual ethnicity. As Christians, we are called to actively

work toward peace, justice, and unity (Psalm 82:3; Psalm 133:1; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3; Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:9; Luke 4:18-19; John 13:34-35, Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:13). We are called to recognize that true justice is achieved when all people, regardless of their background, live together in love and acceptance, when all people know the blessing of a safe “home.”

Our theological commitment demands that we engage deeply with the complexities of the Israel-Palestine conflict, advocating for a permanent ceasefire and a resolution to the land issue that reflects the inclusive and just vision presented by Jesus Christ. As Christians in the Hawai’i Conference of the United Church of Christ, our role is to actively contribute to the realization of God’s kingdom, a place where all people find love, acceptance, and a peaceful home.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS for over seventy-five years Palestinian people have faced dispossession of their land, displacement from their homes, a harsh military occupation, severe restrictions on travel, the military detention of their children, home demolitions, apartheid, and the constant threat of more – and vast inequities in access to natural, economic, and medical resources when compared to that enjoyed by Israeli citizens living in illegal West Bank settlements⁸; and

WHEREAS Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, killing over 1,200 people, including women and children⁹, and taking around 240 hostages¹⁰, which led to a large-scale invasion of the Gaza Strip on October 27, 2023. The stated goals of this invasion were destroying Hamas, freeing the hostages, and controlling the Gaza Strip; and

WHEREAS at the time of this writing, more than 29,100 Palestinian civilians have been killed in Gaza¹¹, with at least 70% of these being women and children¹²; and

WHEREAS at the time of this writing more than 67,000 Palestinians have been injured or maimed in Gaza¹³; and

WHEREAS according to the World Health Organization, as of January 18, 2024, there have been 645 attacks on the health system of the Palestinian territories, including on hospitals, ambulances and vehicles delivering supplies¹⁴; and

⁸ <https://www.globalministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/General-Synod-2021-Resolution-I-P.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.npr.org/2023/11/11/1212458974/israel-revises-death-toll-hamas-attacks-oct-7>

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/article/israel-hostages-hamas-explained.html>

¹¹ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/more-than-29000-palestinians-have-been-killed-in-gaza-since-wars-start-health-ministry-says#:~:text=More%20than%2029%2C000%20Palestinians%20have,war's%20start%2C%20health%20ministry%20says>

¹² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2024/01/press-release-two-mothers-are-killed-in-gaza-every-hour-as-fighting-exceeds-100-days#:~:text=More%20than%2024%2C620%20Palestinians%20have,whom%20were%20women%20or%20children.>

¹³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2024/02/gaza-when-mothers-have-bury-least-7700-children-very-basic-principles-are#:~:text=As%20of%2012%20February%202024,67%2C984%20Palestinians%20have%20been%20injured.>

¹⁴ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/gaza-hospitals-collapsing-rcna132439>

WHEREAS the targeted attacks and killings of journalists are considered war crimes and at the time of this writing, over 122 journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza (and more injured) since October 7¹⁵;

WHEREAS at the time of this writing 51-64% of all buildings in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed¹⁶; and

WHEREAS many United Nations and human rights experts have named that Israel's relentless and indiscriminate attacks in Gaza rise to the level of ethnic cleansing and genocide¹⁷; and

WHEREAS at the time of this writing, the Israeli government is using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, which is illegal under international law and violates the IV Geneva Convention [relative to the protection of civilian persons in times of war], and blocking water, food, fuel, and humanitarian aid from entering Gaza¹⁸; and

WHEREAS the United States of America gives Israel \$4 billion in military aid each year through 2028¹⁹, which is being paid from our members' tax dollars; and

WHEREAS we affirm the worth and dignity of all people; and

WHEREAS we know that the murder of innocent people isn't a political, partisan, or doctrinal issue, but a human issue; and

WHEREAS we desire the release of all hostages and political prisoners taken by Hamas and Israel; and

WHEREAS we acknowledge the difference between antisemitism (hostility to or prejudice against Jewish people) and anti-Zionism (opposition to the unwavering and unconditional support of the state of Israel); and

WHEREAS we recognize that Christ sent the disciples out to begin their ministry of healing and teaching while they were in the midst of learning from him, and because of the urgency of the crisis in Gaza, we likewise may need to learn and act at the same time; and

WHEREAS the United Church of Christ has already passed many resolutions calling for our churches to support just treatment in Palestine and the Palestinian right to exist, including *DECLARATION FOR A JUST PEACE BETWEEN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL* in 2018²⁰; and

¹⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/gaza-un-experts-condemn-killing-and-silencing-journalists>

¹⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68006607>

¹⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/un-expert-warns-new-instance-mass-ethnic-cleansing-palestinians-calls>

¹⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-used-weapon-war-gaza>

¹⁹ <https://www.cfr.org/article/us-aid-israel-four-charts>

²⁰ <https://www.globalministries.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/General-Synod-2021-Resolution-I-P.pdf>

WHEREAS *Cry for Hope: A Call for Decisive Action* issued by Palestinian Christian leaders and theologians in July 2020, states that “the very being of the church, the integrity of the Christian faith, and the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. We declare that support for the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word, or deed, is a sin. We assert that Christian support for Zionism as a theology and an ideology that legitimize the right of one people to deny the human rights of another is incompatible with the Christian faith and a grave misuse of the Bible”; and

WHEREAS the Church is called to work for peace and justice around the world, with both prophetic actions and words; and

WHEREAS we affirm the truth written by the prophet Martin Luther King Jr., when he said, “He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.”²¹; and

WHEREAS we are all called to educate ourselves about issues of suffering, violence, and injustice around the world, in order that we might grow in our faith and in our actions; and

WHEREAS we are called to co-create with the Holy Spirit the kingdom of God in this world – a kingdom of peace and justice and care, where all can know the blessing of “home”;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Two-Hundred and Second ‘Aha Pae‘āina of the Hawai‘i Conference of the United Church of Christ (HCUCC) declares that the time has come for us all – our Conference, our Associations, our churches, and our members – to take a public stand and begin working for a lasting peace between Palestine and Israel; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Two-Hundred and Second ‘Aha Pae‘āina of the HCUCC calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza and Palestine; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this ‘Aha Pae‘āina of the HCUCC calls upon its churches and members to urgently and publicly pray and call for a permanent ceasefire; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this ‘Aha Pae‘āina calls for a Day of Prayer and Public Witness to be organized for our churches. On this day, our churches will be invited to engage in whatever they discern is most fitting in accordance with the spirit and guidance of this resolution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this ‘Aha Pae‘āina of the HCUCC calls upon its churches and members to find a pathway to make their voices heard in the wider community and with legislative officials through letter-writing campaigns, phone calls, social media posts, and/or peaceful protests, calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, as well as for an end to blockades stopping humanitarian aid and/or refunding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in order to provide aid to Palestinians; and

²¹ King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Stride toward Freedom*. Beacon Press, 2010.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this 'Aha Pae'āina calls upon the Justice and Witness Missional Team to provide suggested scripts, prayers and liturgies for the Day of Prayer and Public Witness, and legislative phone numbers for churches and members who desire to speak out or call their representatives about this issue; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this 'Aha Pae'āina commits to educating our churches and members, calling upon its Associations to organize speakers (a list of possible speakers to be provided by the writers of this resolution) about this crisis, possibly including historians, political scientists, and theologians, as well as Palestinians and/or Israelis who can share their stories with us, for continued learning about and engagement with this ongoing struggle; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this 'Aha Pae'āina calls upon each of its churches to offer opportunities for education using curricula provided by the United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this 'Aha Pae'āina calls upon the Conference to sponsor a dual-narrative trip to Israel and Palestine sometime within the next five years (or as soon as it is safe), with the expectation that those who attend will return to educate us all through workshops with Associations and/or the 'Aha. The funds for such a trip will be, at least in part, built into the budget of the Formation Missional Team in the designated year(s); and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that our 'Aha Pae'āina hold itself accountable by adding a discussion about this subject to the agenda of the Two Hundred and Third 'Aha Pae'āina, where we will name together how faithful we have been in upholding this resolution.

Sponsors: Central Union Church (O'ahu), Church of the Holy Cross (Hawai'i), Iao United Church of Christ (Maui), Kaunakapili Church (O'ahu), Nu'uano Congregational Church (O'ahu), and Waimea United Church of Christ (Kaua'i)

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