

Women Respond to the Kairos Palestine Document

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Who are we? We are a WCC gathering of some thirty women from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, North and Latin America and Australia, from different ecclesial traditions and one Jewish woman: lay, ordained, theologians, ecumenical and church leaders, many of us engaged in social action. We have come together to reflect on the Kairos Palestine Document (KPD) as women. We were grateful for the participation of some men, lay and ordained. We are especially thankful for the hospitality of our hosts, Dar Annadwa, KPD contributors and WCC member churches in Palestine.

Listening as a mark of solidarity. We listened with our ears, our eyes, our hearts and our minds.

- We were grateful to listen to those who were involved in the formation of the Kairos Palestine Document and are involved in the continuing movement.
- We listened to our Palestinian sisters explain that there is much work to be done both in the churches and wider Palestinian society to include and engage women fully. However, we also heard that the KPD movement feels equal and welcoming for women; the document was written by and as Palestinians together. We are grateful for the three women who participated in the development of KPD and for the many others who carry forth the movement it has inspired. With them we celebrate the conversations, the listening and the debate sparked by this "Moment of Truth."
- We listened intently to one another reflecting on this document out of the experience of our own contexts, recognizing together that the document is truly a voice from the heart of a suffering people. We heard the voices of people who are resisting oppression in the name of their faith in Jesus Christ with the hope of the reign of God "that is present among us" (3.4.4), a fulfillment of God's love to humankind.
- We saw with our eyes what we have heard with our ears. We will never forget the concrete humiliation and suffering that we witnessed at the Bethlehem checkpoint at the Separation Wall on the way to Jerusalem. Though we only experienced this on a single day, we cannot forget that this is a daily reality in the lives of all Palestinians. We also witnessed the resilience of the people. At the same time we could not be blind to the dehumanizing effect that this reality has on those who maintain this inhuman situation.

- We listened to youth and young adults who are actively engaged in the movement and who seek additional ways to deepen their involvement, demonstrating intergenerational commitment.

Listening has been a wise praxis and a transformative experience inviting and challenging us to action.

What we affirm. There is an ongoing need for the global ecumenical community of women to listen to, strengthen and support the work of Palestinian women.

- This document comes from a broad ecumenical community and has been endorsed by Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, the first time that has happened in this region. We are impressed by the way that Palestinian Christians are discovering a unity in the common struggle against occupation.

- Women hold together and sustain their community. Women have been ecumenically involved in the work of resistance throughout the Israeli occupation. One early marker of this involvement was their contribution to the World Day of Prayer (1994), which shared their theological perspectives with the global church.

- Although the KPD was written by the Palestinian Christian community, its broad scope, incorporating many of the concerns of all Palestinian people, has elicited some supportive engagement from Muslim and Jewish leaders upon which the KPD movement continues to build. We believe this can serve as model for interfaith solidarity beyond the Palestinian context.

- Kairos, the moment of truth, arises from a deadlock of peace negotiations and as a marker of the futility of military solutions. The reality has been about “peace talking”; now is the time for “peace making.” The KPD, thus, affirms non-violent resistance as a way for the end to occupation. It identifies boycott as one of the possible forms of such resistance.

- Whether the solution is one state or two, the occupation must end.

- The KPD articulates the biblical witness of the Palestinian Christian reading of the word of God rooted in the experience of the struggle for justice and transformation.

- The KPD embodies the spirit of faith, hope and love. The energy, the truth-telling and the love expressed in the KPD must be celebrated and affirmed. The KPD and the resulting movement is a challenging gift that connects Palestinian Christians with the worldwide church, and the global church with Palestinian Christians.

Responding together through and in faith, hope and love. We know that in Christ no wall, however high, however obscene, can separate us within the communion of God's own life of love. Realizing that the local Palestinian Christian presence in the birthplace of Christ is under threat, we are compelled to respond together through and in faith, hope and love.

Faith. The KPD especially came alive for us as women through shared narratives and lived experiences. The process of writing the KPD and the ongoing movement names truths of the Palestinian context at this moment of crisis. This naming was not only a reflection of faith for Palestinian Christians but has become a gift of faith to us.

The KPD inspired us to express our own faithfulness. As we began to articulate and expand our solidarity with Palestinian Christians, especially women because of their unique vulnerabilities, Biblical images emerged for us. We heard Rachel's cry for her children as the wall between Bethlehem and Jerusalem separates Palestinians from each other (Jeremiah 31:15-17). At the same time, the KPD challenged us to examine our own theologies, particularly in relation to issues of occupation. Through our conversations we also remembered the ways that many indigenous and liberation theologies have created problematic "theologies" that justify occupation.

The KPD witnesses to the connection between racism and the oppression of occupation and calls our churches to do likewise. As women, we recognized and named the complex webs of systemic and structural oppression. As an initial response of faithfulness, we acknowledge the ways in which intersections of racism, economic control, militarism, colonization and gender inequalities multiply the dehumanizing effects of occupation.

Hope. In the KPD the Palestinian Christians articulate hope "despite the lack of a glimmer of expectation" (3.1). As women, we recognize the struggles of Palestinian women to keep hope alive. We as women, see the multiple dimensions of hope reflected in the KPD. This hope is drawn out of faith and, in turn, strengthens faith – demonstrating how faith and hope are dynamically interrelated. As we give account of our hope we give account of our faith. We are co-workers with God. We as women, reading the struggle of Palestinians, are reminded of the struggle of women in different parts of the world for justice, peace and dignity. In turn, the Palestinians' struggle matters to others because that is where God is in solidarity. Christ is in solidarity with those of us made to suffer in any society. God is already working in the Signs of hope (KPD 3.3) and our responsibility is to claim those signs together as a community of hope and to live as a communion of hope.

Love in Action. The discussion on love focused on the practices of love through the pursuit of just peace. The KPD called for a love in action. As women this integral connection between love and action resonated with us. It spoke from the heart and the head, the soul and the spirit of Palestinian Christians. Love is a creative form of

resistance. This love as resistance came forth in its impassioned call for non-violent actions to end the occupation, to end the violence and daily humiliation endured by Palestinians, and to put a final stop to the continuing oppressive control of land and water enabled by the occupation. For, love is both "seeing the face of God in every human being" as well as correcting evil and ending aggression (4.2.1). Fundamentally, non-violent resistance to oppression *is* love for *all* of humanity.

The strength of the KPD is its call for just peace. Land is at the heart of this call: in relation to occupation, colonization, imperialism, power and control. Dehumanization is an inescapable result of the occupation. Land is central in the reading and misreading of sacred scriptures. As women, we see that the issue of land is an issue of heart, identity and life. "Our land is God's land as is the case with all countries in the world. . . . It is holy inasmuch as God is present in it" (2.3.1). Humanity's relationship to land is a matter of faith, hope and love.

In this call, our Christian sisters and brothers are reminding us of our particular contribution as a community of faith to all struggles for peace. As women, we affirm that without justice there can be no peace.

Not only a living document, the KPD has become a movement to which we commit ourselves as a continuing mark of our solidarity.

- We women, with all our diversity, who have shared this experience, commit ourselves to:
 - o Engage with the KPD, and thus with the Palestinian context, and to respond to its calls for action in our own contexts.
 - o Support advocates, especially women, for the Palestinian cause who can speak truth.
- We each commit ourselves to:
 - o Pray for just peace with and for the people in this land and the entire region. We shall hold our Palestinian sisters in our prayers, sharing a special act of solidarity.
 - o Share our experiences with our communities through our public witness, preaching, teaching and research.
 - o Report to our faith communities and other constituencies.
 - o Support the WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).

- o Engage with civil society through national and international governmental structures, non-governmental organizations and community based movements to use their power in constructive ways to end this occupation.

- Having been gathered by the WCC, we challenge on all churches to

- o Promote and prayerfully engage the KPD's calls for action:

- § Repent of theologies which are used to support unjust political options (6.1) and stand alongside the oppressed in their life affirming theologies.

- § Visit Palestine in order to experience deeply both the suffering and the resilience of the people, and carry it home as a witness. We encourage all to "come and see" (6.2).

- § Reject all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (6.3).

- § Boycott, divest, and support sanctions (BDS) as non-violent action (4.2.6).

- § Participate in World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel through promotion and use of resources developed by the WCC.

- In particular, we ask the fellowship of churches in the WCC to:

- o Strengthen the work of Women in Church and Society (WCS) and, in particular, to continue collaboration with Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF), support advanced theological training for Palestinian women, and develop more initiatives that involve Palestinian women and their concerns.

- o Include the KPD, its developing movement, and the voices of Palestinian women in the program of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC).

- o Ensure that the WCS strengthens and develops further its commitment to the process of building just communities of women and men leading and that this is incorporated into the next WCC Assembly.

- o Continue Bern process through a deepened examination of the theological significance of land.

- o Expand the EAPPI, especially through raising awareness about this work and increasing the presence in Palestine.

- o Embed the Palestinian struggle against oppression in all the WCC conciliar processes.

Continuing the Conversation as Women. The following questions were raised among us as we all long for solidarity and transformation. We look forward to continued conversation of solidarity amongst ourselves, between us and Palestinians, and within our communities. We seek the appropriate context for addressing these questions, which includes conversations amongst ourselves, Palestinian women in Palestine and in the Diaspora. These questions include:

- What is life in abundance for Palestinian women of today both in Palestine and in the Diaspora?
- How can non-violent resistance be practiced in homes and in society?
- What does "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female" (Galatians 3:28) mean in the local context for Palestinian Christian women and men, and for each of us in our contexts?
- How can the churches assist women and men so that they ask questions about just equality in its legal, political, economic and social dimensions, an equality that is not only between one people and another, but also between women and men?

It is our prayer that just as KPD has become a living document and movement, that our response will strengthen the