

Women offer theological perspectives on "Kairos Palestine"

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Thirty women gathered in Bethlehem on 13-18 December to celebrate the first anniversary of the "Kairos Palestine" document on the quest for peace and human rights in Palestine and Israel. The gathering also reflected theologically on the content of the text. Participants came from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, North and Latin America and Australia.

The group represented different ecclesial traditions and included one member of the Jewish faith. They were lay, ordained, theologians, ecumenical and church leaders, and many are engaged in social action. The Bethlehem gathering was sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC) office on Women in Church and Society and by the Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum.

The women also experienced the visible reality of the occupation of Palestine during visits to Israeli checkpoints and encounters with the Separation Wall. They united around a common hope for the end of the occupation and a call for just peace.

The women embraced "listening as a mark of solidarity": a form of participation during the meeting and a point of origin for the just peacemaking work to be done following the meeting. Faith, hope and love expressed through just peace were themes within "Kairos Palestine" that these women found particularly inspiring.

They noted the inclusion of three Palestinian women in the writing process that produced the text and listened to a few Palestinian women explain that, although they found the document a testament to equality and welcoming for women, "there is much work to be done both in the churches and wider Palestinian society" to include and engage women fully. They affirmed that "there is an ongoing need for the global ecumenical community of women to listen to, strengthen and support the work of Palestinian women".

During a larger one-year celebration of Kairos Palestine, Dame Dr Mary Tanner, European president of the WCC, offered greetings on behalf of the group of women gathered to reflect on the document.

"We pledge ourselves to pray for you, knowing that in Christ no wall, however high, however obscene, can separate us in the communion of God's own life of love. What happens to you happens to us, your pain is our pain, and your struggle becomes our struggle," Tanner said.

"We will accompany you in that movement which the Kairos Palestine document has begun and bring it, in whatever ways we can, into our ministries, into our churches and societies. Your story will be our story and we will ask the fellowship of churches in the WCC that has gathered us to take your witness and your challenges into its work and into the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in May 2011," she continued. "We shall not be silent."