

THE ROAD FROM CEASEFIRE TO PEACE

The Urgent Task of Ending Genocide, Occupation, and Apartheid
as the Only Path Toward Peace with Justice for Palestinians and Israelis:

A ROADMAP FOR UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST ADVOCACY AND SOLIDARITY

From the United Church of Christ Movement for Palestinian Solidarity (UCCMPS),
to all congregations, conferences and settings of the Church.

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A CEASEFIRE, HOWEVER STABLE, IS NOT PEACE:

The declaration of a ceasefire in Gaza in October, 2025, was a welcome step toward ending the genocide that has killed at least 68,000 Gazans and left Gaza's 2.3 million population displaced multiple times, most with no homes to return to amid the rubble of relentless bombing. The recent return of Israeli hostages captured on October 7, 2023, including 20 of them alive and the bodies of 17 of the 28 who died in captivity, and the release of close to 2,000 of the 11,000 Palestinians Israel has imprisoned since October 7 brought relief to many families. That said, dueling accusations of ceasefire violations have allowed Israel and its United States sponsor to justify extremely deadly military assaults on the civilian population in Gaza, and humanitarian aid, while increasing, remains far below the amounts needed to avoid starvation for many. Meanwhile, the reduction in violence in Gaza and ensuing celebration of ceasefire have provided cover for dramatically increased settler and Israeli military violence and detentions in the West Bank.



A ceasefire, however stable, is not peace. The fact that this current ceasefire was orchestrated by Israel, the United States, and Arab nations while largely excluding Palestinian voices and imposed under the relentless threats of continued genocide serves as a warning. Israel's settler colonialist history and its treatment of its Palestinian citizens and neighbors going back nearly eighty years have provoked regular eruptions of violence resulting in multiple ceasefires, peace agreements, and peace plans which have all proved to be either partial, illusory, or disingenuous. They have repeatedly distracted the international community from an increasingly oppressive occupation and the creation of an apartheid regime.

But now, since October 7, most of the international community is paying attention and speaking out not only against Israel's genocide but against its expansion of settlements, its mass detentions of Palestinians, including children, its home demolitions, its repeated violations of international law and human rights, and its denial of the legitimacy of Palestinian rights to sovereignty or to full citizenship. Meanwhile, Israel's increasingly right-wing government pursues the goal of full annexation of Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, with apparent acceptance by a majority of the Israeli population. The ceasefire and the current peace plan fail to address the perpetuation of these injustices.

A MATTER OF THEOLOGICAL URGENCY: In 2021 the General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted a resolution titled “Declaration for a Just Peace Between Israel and Palestine.” It offered a theological framework, consistent with international law and human rights norms, for meaningful and enduring peace in the region based on justice rather than military domination. It serves as a plumb line against which to assess any peace process and proposals, and becomes particularly relevant as the Trump and Netanyahu administrations outline a way forward which they seek to impose on Palestinians. Shaped by classic forms of Christian confession in the face of Kairos moments in history, the resolution’s affirmations and rejections speak boldly to the current crisis as instructive warnings and hopeful signs for any roadmap toward peace from ceasefire.

The General Synod, speaking to the churches and members of the United Church of Christ in 2021, stated:

***We affirm** that the continued oppression of the Palestinian people remains, after more than five decades of oppression of the Palestinian people, a matter of theological urgency and represents a sin in violation of the message of the biblical prophets and the Gospel, and that all efforts to defend or legitimate the oppression of the Palestinian people, whether passive or active, through silence, word, or deed by the Christian community, represent a fundamental denial of the Gospel.*

***Therefore, we reject** the notion that Israel’s occupation of Palestine is a purely political problem outside the concern of the church or that the oppression of the Palestinian people is an inevitable consequence of global or regional geopolitical interests.*

Any roadmap toward peace from ceasefire carries theological implications which the church must consider. In solidarity with our Christian Palestinian neighbors, we are called to remind political and diplomatic actors that negotiations, agreements, and compromises, particularly when imposed militarily and diplomatically by the strong against the weak, carry spiritual and theological implications requiring prophetic critique based on God’s preferential option for the poor and the vulnerable.

***We affirm** that the biblical narrative beginning with creation and extending through the calling of the Israelites, the corrective admonitions of the prophets, the incarnation and ministry of Jesus and the witness of the apostles to the “ends of the earth” . . . speaks of God’s blessing extending to “all the families of the earth.” (Genesis 12.3)*

***Therefore, we reject** any theology or ideology including Christian Zionism, Supercessionism, antisemitism or anti-Islam bias that would privilege or exclude any one nation, race, culture, or religion within God’s universal economy of grace.*

Any roadmap toward peace from ceasefire must not privilege Israelis over Palestinians, nor encourage the demonization and dehumanizing of Palestinians, and must avoid justifications for occupation of the land based on distorted readings of the Bible by Jews and Christian Zionists that grant special rights to Israel up to and including annexation of the land from the river to the sea.

We affirm that all people living in Palestine and Israel are created in the image of God and that this bestows ultimate dignity and sacredness to all;

Therefore, we reject any laws and legal procedures which are used by one race or religion to enshrine one people in a privileged legal position at the expense of another, including Israel's apartheid system of laws and legal procedures.

Any roadmap toward peace from ceasefire must recognize the full dignity of Palestinians as a people and must lead toward clear commitments to ending the occupation and the dismantling of a sinful apartheid regime.

***We affirm** that all peoples have the right to self-determination and to their aspirations for sovereignty and statehood in the shaping of their corporate religious, cultural, and political life, free from manipulation or pressure from outside powers, and that a just resolution of conflicting claims is only achieved through peaceful negotiation based on international law and UN resolutions, the equal protection of civil rights, and the fair and just sharing of land and resources.*

***Therefore, we reject** the use of Scripture to claim a divine right to the land as the rationale for Israel's illegal seizure and annexation of Palestinian land as well as the imposition of so-called peace agreements by Israel or the United States through the exercise of political and military domination that leaves Palestinians without equal rights, full citizenship, and the opportunity to thrive religiously, culturally, politically, and economically.*

Any roadmap toward peace from ceasefire must be built on the legitimacy of Palestinian sovereignty, and negotiations must include the full participation of Palestinian leadership chosen by Palestinians themselves. A just peace cannot be shaped by Israeli and American political actors alone, or with the selective engagement of Palestinian actors vetted by the occupying powers.

***We affirm** the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes if they so choose or to be compensated for their loss of property, consistent with UN General Assembly resolution 194 (1948).*

***Therefore, we reject** the denial of this right, just as we reject efforts to manipulate internationally-agreed upon definitions of refugees to attempt to erase this right which extends across generations.*

Any roadmap toward peace from ceasefire must no longer ignore UN resolutions addressing the rights of Palestinian refugees living for generations in refugee camps in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, or in the diaspora. Promises made by the international community almost eighty years ago can no longer be ignored or dismissed aided by the decades long pattern of United States vetoes of Security Council resolutions.

We affirm the First Amendment constitutional right to freedom of speech and assembly to protest the actions of the State of Israel and to uphold the rights of Palestinians, including the use of economic measures to support justice as a First Amendment right and joining the international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement by individuals, institutions, corporations, and religious bodies that advocate peace with justice or participate in any aspect of the use of economic measures to support justice.

Therefore, we reject the idea that any criticism of policies of the State of Israel is inherently antisemitic, and we oppose the efforts of U.S. federal and state governments to limit free speech on university campuses and to restrict or ban support of the international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement.

Any roadmap toward peace from ceasefire cannot privilege Israel by denying supporters of the legitimate rights of Palestinians the ability to advocate for those rights using non-violent methods, including support for the BDS movement. The silencing of university students and faculty, immigrants, or politicians through restrictions on free speech, the illegal or selective use of immigration enforcement, and the weaponization of anti-Semitism isolates Palestinians from the support of international solidarity. In addition it unlawfully inhibits the legitimate critique of Israel's occupation and apartheid system supported by the US government, as well as of the US-Israeli peace process as currently conceived.

NOT CHARITY, BUT DIGNITY: The suffering of the Palestinian people will not be relieved by a partially and easily violated ceasefire, as important as that is as a first step. Nor will their legitimate political and ethical aspirations be achieved through a peace process orchestrated and controlled by the very forces that committed genocide against them and that have imposed an illegal occupation over them for decades. A true roadmap toward a just peace requires the affirmation of the human dignity of all parties and rejects schemes which simply create a more insidious occupation, provide corrupt economic opportunities to powerful outside business interests, or advance the annexation agenda.

In the book of Amos, the prophet envisions God holding a plumb line as a measure of Israel's faithfulness. In keeping with that image, the "Declaration for a Just Peace Between Palestine and Israel" offers its set of affirmations and rejections as a plumb line for measuring any steps toward peace with justice. Based on the "Declaration," the current proposals by the Trump administration for the future of Gaza and all of Palestine are seriously out of plumb. Lutheran pastor Munther Isaac of Bethlehem reminds us that **"peace cannot be imposed. Rather it must be built on justice, equality, and the recognition of every human life as sacred. The people of Gaza, and all Palestinians, deserve not charity but dignity; not reconstruction under occupation but liberation from it. The ceasefire has given us a moment to breathe. May it also be the moment we awake to the truth that peace without justice is merely the continuation of war by quieter means,"** (*Sojourners*, October 22, 2025).

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