

A nerve centre of the world's religious life?

Perspectives from the World Council of Churches on Israel and Palestine

The World Church of Churches and the State of Israel were formally born in the same year. It would however probably not be true to say that they were twins, or perhaps they were, if like Jacob and Esau they could be conceived of struggling with each other even in the womb. In April 1948 Israel declared its independence. In late August 1948 the WCC held its first Assembly – in Amsterdam – and both Christian relations with Judaism and the emergence of the State of Israel were on the agenda. It was interesting how it was felt appropriate – in a way that I suspect would probably not happen today – for the same Assembly report to tackle both Christian attitudes to Judaism and to the State of Israel. The fairly substantial report, which was entitled *The Christian Approach to the Jews* was ‘received by the Assembly and commended to the churches for their serious consideration and appropriate action’. Both the structure and the order of the content is telling.

Reading the report as a whole (which is done quite rarely these days) it is clear that the key thrust of the document is concerned with Christian mission to Jews and Judaism. The report began with a short discussion of ‘*The Church's commission to preach the Gospel to all men*’ – spelling out quite explicitly that this included Jews. This was then amplified by the second section, ‘*The special meaning of the Jewish people for Christian faith*’ which was seeking to nuance the Jewish-Christian dimension and, in my reading of the text, acknowledge an intrinsic ambiguity. So it both includes the comment, ‘The Church has received this spiritual heritage from Israel and is therefore in honour bound to render it back in the light of the Cross. We have, therefore, in humble conviction to proclaim to the Jews, "The Messiah for Whom you wait has come." The promise has been fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ.’ But also reflects in a separate paragraph, ‘For many the continued existence of a Jewish people which does not acknowledge Christ is a divine mystery which finds its only sufficient explanation in the purpose of God's unchanging faithfulness and mercy (Romans xi, 25-29).’ In the next section comes the discussion on antisemitism, though tellingly the section itself is headed, ‘*Barriers to be overcome*’. It does however acknowledge an element of Christian responsibility for antisemitism, and includes the strong and often quoted famous declaration which has had considerable influence in the wider Christian world, ‘We call upon

all the churches we represent to denounce anti-semitism, no matter what its origin, as absolutely irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith. Anti-Semitism is sin against God and man.' I have often wondered about that final short sentence – Anti-Semitism is sin against God and man – *not* 'a' sin against God and man. Was it accidental, due perhaps to the vagaries of working in translation that the 'a', the indefinite article was omitted, or was it seeking to suggest somehow that antisemitism was in some way the archetypal sin? It is however very telling that the final reason given for opposing antisemitism is directly linked to Christian mission to the Jews, 'Only as we give convincing evidence to our Jewish neighbours that we seek for them the common rights and dignities which God wills for His children, can we come to such a meeting with them as would make it possible to share with them the best which God has given us in Christ.' The fourth section, the longest in the document, is entitled, *The Christian witness to the Jewish people* and is an exploration of the desirability of various methodologies of Christian missionary activity to Jewish people, with the clear aim of seeking their conversion to Christ. The section both affirms Christian mission to Jews, but seems to argue against a distinct segregated 'Jewish mission' on the part of the churches.

It is only when all this have been discussed that the report reaches its fifth section which is headed· '*The emergence of Israel as a state*'. Even the title is slightly intriguing, for 'The emergence of Israel as a state' carries a slightly different linguistic and possibly theological nuance to 'The emergence of the state of Israel'. Because of its fundamental importance to the topic of this paper I quote it in full:

'The establishment of the state "Israel" adds a political dimension to the Christian approach to the Jews and threatens to complicate anti-semitism with political fears and enmities. On the political aspects of the Palestine problem and the complex conflict of "rights" involved we do not undertake to express a judgment. Nevertheless, we appeal to the nations to deal with the problem not as one of expediency—political, strategic or economic—but as a moral and spiritual question that touches a nerve centre of the world's religious life.

Whatever position may be taken towards the establishment of a Jewish state and towards the "rights" and "wrongs" of Jews and Arabs, of Hebrew Christians and Arab Christians

involved, the churches are in duty bound to pray and work for an order in Palestine as just as may be in the midst of our human disorder; to provide within their power for the relief of the victims of this warfare without discrimination; and to seek to influence the nations to provide a refuge for "Displaced Persons" far more generously than has yet been done.'

It is probably important to remember that this statement was issued while the first Arab-Israeli war was still very much in flow. Three observations:

1. The reflection on Israel is partly seen as a subsidiary issue to other topics that have already been raised in the statement, for example antisemitism.
2. I am struck by the way that in the first line sentence of the body text, 'The establishment of the state "Israel" – the word Israel apparently appears in inverted commas – which somehow conveys a sense of studied ambiguity as to whether Israel is being understood as a political or theological concept.
3. And I am fascinated by the comment that the issue – or rather 'problem' should be treated as 'a moral and spiritual question that touches a nerve centre of the world's religious life.' 'Nerve centre' is an intriguing phrase – with both positive and negative possible connotations, but in spite of, or perhaps because of, this ambiguity it certainly carries the possibility of viewing the establishment of the State of Israel from a religious perspective. The 'religious life' touched upon may presumably include Judaism, as well as Christianity and Islam. When I hear these words I am reminded of the language used by a French Dominican specialist in Jewish-Christian studies, Fr Marcel Dubois, who used to speak of *Le mystere d'Israel*. I was intrigued to discover that it was apparently a British Anglican clergyman Canon Henry Wolfe Baines, who later became the bishop first of Singapore and then of Wellington, New Zealand, who suggested that the sentence about nerve centre should be included in the WCC statement. And it is fairly recently that I have realised that the same image and virtually the same sentence appears in a resolution of the Lambeth Conference of 1948. Originally I assumed that the Lambeth Conference had borrowed the phrase from the WCC Assembly, but actually that cannot have been the case, because the Lambeth Conference took place in the first half of August and the WCC Amsterdam Assembly at the end of the same month. So that phrase 'nerve centre' is one for which we Anglicans are directly responsible!

I am not going to take you on a detailed chronological journey of WCC positions on Israel and Palestine between 1948 and today although I will shortly look at the helpful synthesis paper offered in 2017 by Peter Prove, currently Director of the Churches Commission on International Affairs. However I do want first to look at a report apparently produced by a World Council of Churches study group in 1956 which summarised its stance on a revived nationalism among the Jewish people and the existence of the State of Israel. It reads like an object lesson in studied ambivalence:

‘We cannot say a plain yes to the forces of nationalism, for that would be to endorse forces of corporate selfishness and antagonism with all the suffering they cause. On the other hand we cannot say a plain no, because the church does not stand for a vague cosmopolitanism. The answer lies between the yes and the no... To the State of Israel we cannot say an absolute no, for we must all sympathise with the sufferings of the Jewish people and rejoice whenever by God’s grace they are delivered from them. Yet we cannot say an absolute yes, for the setting up of the State of Israel while it has relieved the sufferings of many Jews, has involved great suffering to many Arabs who have lost their land and their homes. Moreover while we understand the desire of many Jews to have a country of their own, we believe it is their calling to live as the people of God and not merely to become a people like others.’

There are a couple of observations that I want to make about this to help set this in a wider context. The first is the question of the fraught relationship between religious identity and nationalism which is somehow written into the life and history of the WCC. If I were to summarize the founding vision of the WCC I would say that, stemming initially from the First World War and then confirmed by the experience of the Second, there was a deeply held view that our identity as Christians needed to be considered as fundamental and seen as prior to and if necessary over against one’s national or ethnic identity as British, German, American, France, Swiss etc. It is linked of course to the New Testament affirmation that ‘our citizenship is in heaven’. I would phrase it as saying that that was the ‘pure’ vision of the fathers of the WCC.

But by 1956 and the beginning of the end of the colonial period, 'nationalism' could not be seen as quite the dirty word it had appeared to be in the European context a few years earlier: if nationalism helped to bring an end to colonial rule then surely it had to be viewed in positive terms. In addition – how did this view of the priority of religious identity over against national or ethnic identity fit with the assumptions of other religious traditions than Christianity – in particular Judaism and Islam? Kenneth Cragg – who gave us the title for the conference at which this paper was presented – once said that Islam is a religion continually in the process of becoming a state. This may be an over statement – but I think that you cannot make that sharp separation between religion and state that is characteristic of at least one strand of Christianity. And that has played, and continues to play into the conflict in Israel and Palestine. You may not like – and I don't particularly – the Israeli vision of Israel even within its internationally agreed boundaries as a 'Jewish state' but it becomes more difficult to argue against that in an absolute way given that most of Israel's neighbouring states have religion, mainly Islam, written into the fabric of their own civil and political lives. In that sense one might also say that Judaism can be seen as a sort of mirror image of Islam – in which ethnicity, nationalism and religion are somehow messily interwoven in a way that might offend western Christian sensitivities – partly of course because the definition of what is actually a religion has largely been formulated in a western Christian context. It becomes a particularly fraught issue in relation to Judaism because traditionally Christians have felt that they can pontificate on and define what Judaism ought or ought not to be in a kind of way they would not attempt to do in relation to any other religionⁱⁱ. You can view this attitude in the last sentence of the quotation above – which, to be blunt, can read like offensive Christian patronising of Jews: "Moreover while we understand the desire of many Jews to have a country of their own, we believe it is their calling to live as the people of God and not merely to become a people like others." Given Christian history – have Christians any right to tell Jews what is their 'calling'? However hard we may claim it does not – I do think an implicit Christian supersessionism and an unconscious holding on to the old trope of the 'wandering Jew' can perhaps affect Christian attitudes in Israel and Palestine.

It is an enormously complicated issue – but I am sure our understanding of religion and its link to, or separation from, ethnic and political identity does play a significant role in the convoluted story of Israel and Palestine. Let me give a couple of other examples. We talked

briefly last night about the *millet* (A Turkish word which originally meant 'nation') system, deriving from the way that the Ottoman Turks had ruled their lands, including Palestine. The Ottomans worked through the leadership of each of the religious communities, including the churches, which gave the leadership of each of these communities a considerable amount of control over the lives of their adherents and helped to reinforce the interplay between religious and national/ethnic identity. And the remains of that system is still powerful in both Israel and Palestine today and has produced a network of quasi 'nations' defined largely by their religious identity. But in the case of the Greek Orthodox community, headed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos – there is an additional complication – in that the leadership of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is almost entirely Greek, while the lay people and lower ranks of clergy are Arab, Palestinians or Jordanians, who often feel alienated from the leadership which they regard as unsympathetic. Several of the more radical Christian voices in Israel and Palestine have come from this community.

Some years ago in 2011 with a group of colleagues, I visited a group of Palestinian Christians linked to the Sabeel movement in north Jerusalem. What I most remember most vividly is the woman who fervently asserted to us, 'I am a Palestinian first and a Christian second'. In one sense I was shocked: that was not the way that we had been taught to think about our Christian faith in the liberal west. But I have wrestled with her comment which ultimately helped me understand something the different contours of the interface between religion and politics in Israel and Palestine and the wider Middle East.

That incident took place in 2011. One of the factors that we need to take account of – and certainly has affected WCC policies relating to the Middle East, is the hopes – largely unfulfilled I feel – of significant change in the Arab world, which were in the air in 2011. It was initially called the 'Arab spring', but sadly degenerated fairly quickly into a long Arab winter, certainly in Syria and Iraq. I know that many of my Middle Eastern colleagues and friends were hoping for developments that would result in a sense of 'common citizenship' in the various states of the Middle East– in which religious identity would no longer play any significant part in how individuals were viewed within state and society. Ultimately that vision does not seem to have been realised, at least to date, – and I do think its non

realisation has played some part in the stagnation of discussions and peace-making in Israel and Palestine during this period.

I think that this fraught question of the relationship between religion and state plays a considerable part in the challenge of Israel and Palestine, and impacts upon the WCC's responses, and perhaps even sense of ambiguity about Israel, at least as an overtly Jewish state. In fact of course the relationship between religion and state is not monolithic, even in the WCC itself. The early 1960s saw the entry into the WCC of a significant number of Orthodox churches for whom the model of the intertwining of religious and ethno-national identities was instinctive – and for whom as well a broadly supersessionist viewpoint vis-a-vis Judaism is largely still prevalent. One of the related consequences of the importance of Orthodox Christianity within the WCC family of member churches is that the WCC has not produced formal authorised theological statements about the continuing covenantal interrelationship of Judaism and Christianity, such as the Roman Catholic Church has produced in recent years, as for example, its 2015 statement *The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable*. The wide spectrum of theological views on Judaism among current WCC member churches would not allow it. There have been a number of significant reports produced by working groups, such as *Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (1982) and *The Churches and the Jewish People: Towards a New Understanding (the 'Sigtuna' document)* (1988) but these documents are either not formally authorised by WCC governance meetings (see below on what this means), or they very carefully omit to acknowledge explicitly the continuing validity of Judaism.ⁱⁱⁱ It would however be true to say that the focus on mission to the Jews and potential conversion of Jews to Christianity found in the 1948 WCC Assembly documents has over the years been quietly dropped, not necessarily because of a more positive attitude to Judaism *per se*, but at least because of a wider sense of embarrassment in WCC circles about any understanding of mission as actively seeking the conversion of others to Christianity.

One last comment on that classically ambivalent note from the 1956 study group. I came across it not in the WCC's own archives and documentation but quoted in a book by an external author Geoffrey Wigoder, *Jewish-Christians relations since the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, 1988. There was no full reference back to the group which

supposedly wrote it. Rather Wigoder's reference says, 'Cited in U.Tal, *The new pattern in Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1969'. At some point when I have the opportunity to trawl through the WCC archives I would like to find the original WCC document. I would particularly like to find the original because Wigoder's book is written from a perspective hostile as a whole to the WCC, so I do want to check its accuracy. In fact the hostility with which the WCC is treated by a variety of groups is itself a part of the story of the WCC and Israel and Palestine.

I turn to the excellent summary of the WCC positions on Palestine and Israel, offered by the Director of CCIA. It is not fully comprehensive – I have noticed one or two gaps particularly linked to documentation that has come out of the interreligious dialogue work of the WCC – but it is very helpful. One of the things that the document does is help to make clear what is official WCC policy, and by implication what is not. Formally WCC policy is made by three bodies – the WCC Assembly which meets about every 7 years, the Central Committee which meets every 2 years, and the Executive Committee which meets twice a year. There is a descending order of importance – what is said by an Assembly is considered most binding and significant. All the bullet points therefore are precised remarks of documents approved or authorised at one of these meetings of governance. I include the entirety of the document as Appendix 1 to this article, but list the bullet point headings also at this point.

☐ Palestinians have the right of self-determination; their duly elected governmental authorities must be recognised; their refugees have the right of return and require a permanent solution.

☐ Israel and its legitimate security needs are recognised, beginning with the state's emergence in 1948, to UN guarantees for its existence, in the right to protect its people under international law, and in guarantees for the territorial integrity of all nations in the area including Israel.

☐ Violence in all its forms is condemned, whether perpetrated by the State of Israel inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories or by Palestinian armed groups inside the State of Israel. The conflict cannot be resolved through the use of force but only through peaceful

means. WCC member churches are called to accompany and encourage the commitment to non-violence and active engagement in peace negotiations.

☒ Antisemitism is condemned. WCC calls upon all churches to denounce antisemitism, no matter what its origin, as irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith. Antisemitism is a sin against God and humanity. Criticism of the policies of the Israeli government is not in itself anti-Jewish.

☒ WCC supports a two-state solution where Israelis and Palestinians live side by side within secure, recognised borders and share Jerusalem, as per UN Security Council resolutions.

☒ Supporting the churches and indigenous Palestinian Christian presence and witness for peace in Palestine and Israel is a central priority for WCC and the ecumenical movement.

The Christian faith has its historical roots in this land, and is nourished by the unbroken witness of the local churches who have their own roots in apostolic times. WCC seeks to reinforce a positive engagement by churches in the life of the nations to which they belong. Loss of the Christian presence would endanger inter-communal conviviality and peace. The future of Christian communities is increasingly threatened by Israeli settlement policies and violations of the fundamental rights of Palestinians. Local authorities must not interfere in internal church affairs.

☒ The Kairos Palestine document is a call to the Palestinian Christian community to remain steadfast in their land, witnessing to God's love for all, while peacefully and creatively resisting the occupation. WCC member churches and the ecumenical movement are called to study and disseminate it, and listen and respond to the aspirations of Palestinian Christians expressed therein.

☒ The occupation of the OPT since 1967 is illegal and must be ended. It is only through an end to the occupation and a just, comprehensive and lasting peace settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) can security of both Palestinians and Israelis be assured. Without an end to occupation, the cycle of violence continues.

☒ Settlements in the OPT are illegal, as is their expansion. Such settlements are prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention, illegal, unjust, incompatible with peace, antithetical to the legitimate interests of the State of Israel, an obstacle to the two-state solution and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state – as affirmed by UN Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). Israeli settlers and soldiers must be withdrawn. A freeze on all settlement

construction and expansion should be implemented, as a first step towards the dismantlement of all illegal settlements in the OPT.

☒ Construction of the Separation Barrier in occupied Palestinian territory is illegal. It is a grave breach of international law and humanitarian law, and must be removed from occupied territory.

☒ Certain economic measures are legitimate forms of non-violent resistance to occupation and positive pressure for peace. WCC supports an international boycott of goods and services from illegal Israeli settlements in the OPT. WCC considers targeted economic measures an important non-violent strategy for promoting peace and abating violence, and encourages member churches to avoid investments or other economic links to illegal activities on occupied territory. Member churches are encouraged to “thoughtfully and prayerfully consider how they might respond from the foundation of their faith” in their own contexts.

☒ Jerusalem must be an open, inclusive and shared city for two peoples and three religions. The rights of its communities – Muslim, Jewish and Christian, Palestinian and Israeli – including access to Holy Places and freedom of worship, must be assured. WCC opposes the annexation of East Jerusalem and other unilateral actions altering the city’s geography and demography. The final status of Jerusalem must be agreed within the framework of international law and as part of a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement. Illegal settlements in and around Jerusalem – and restriction of Jerusalem residency rights – threaten this vision, pre-empting and obstructing negotiations for a comprehensive peace agreement.

☒ The WCC supports groups on both sides working for peace and reconciliation, including inter-religious initiatives.

☒ A just peace in Palestine and Israel is essential for peace in the world. Unresolved, this conflict generates instability in the region and insecurity in other regions.

It is important to look at this list of what are official WCC positions – in part because there is often confusion and misunderstandings regarding what they are. There is a much wider range of WCC activities, meetings, conferences, consultations, study groups which regularly issue statements (perhaps particularly in relation to contentious areas about which individuals and particular groups feel strongly). But it is only statements agreed by the

Assembly, the Central Committee or the Executive Committee that are formally considered authorised statements of the WCC. In my view what we have above is, with perhaps one exception^{iv}, a comprehensive and helpful list of what it is appropriate for the WCC, as a Christian body committed to working for peace with justice to be seeking to promote.

However if I analyse the topics referred to in the list above it is notable that some elements of WCC policy in this area have not been promoted recently in governance meetings. In particular a commitment to a two-state solution does not appear to have been proactively advocated since 2009, and the last time that a condemnation of antisemitism was made at a governance meeting of the WCC seems to have been in 1992. I can bear witness, on the basis of my years working for the WCC, that it would not be uncomplicated at the present time to have a discussion on antisemitism at a governance meeting that resulted in a statement about this issue. There is I think a subtle shift in WCC thinking in some areas of policy: perhaps inevitable and understandable given that the expansion of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian Territories during the last 20 years has seemingly made a two-state solution much more difficult to achieve.

Given that it was the last substantial discussion of issues relating to Israel and Palestine at a WCC governance meeting I set out as Appendix 2 below, the *Statement on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Peace Process* issued at the June 2016 Central Committee meeting held in Trondheim.

There is one remark in that Statement that both intrigues and irritates me. It is the comment that the WCC:

'Calls on WCC member churches, specialized ministries and ecumenical partners to recognize the danger of using scripture to in any way justify occupation, and to recognize **Christian Zionism** as a form of **Christian** fundamentalism endangering especially indigenous Palestinian **Christian** communities.'

I am intrigued at this reference to 'Christian Zionism' appearing in a formal WCC document. As far as I can tell, although there has been previous work on the topic of Christian Zionism sponsored by the WCC^v, the actual expression 'Christian Zionism' had never previously appeared in a formal WCC governance document. It is telling that it should now come up.

However I am irritated at the lack of theological sophistication which treats Christian Zionism simply as an expression of Christian fundamentalism. Whether one approves or disapproves of Christian Zionism it cannot simply be dismissed by called it 'fundamentalism'. It depends, of course, on one's precise definition of Christian Zionism, and clearly there are many 'fundamentalist' expressions of it. However, at the very least, the correlation between Christian Zionism and fundamentalism cannot be simply assumed in the way that this document seems to do. In a conference on 'fundamentalism' in January 2018 at which I was invited to present a paper, I argued that not all Christian theological support for a Jewish homeland can be described as 'fundamentalist.' Given its representative Christian international role it would in fact be a useful task for the WCC to undertake a serious theological exploration of the nature and parameters of Christian Zionism.

I think that (for reasons that are very understandable) the WCC has always found it deeply difficult to address the question of possible theological significance in relation to the question of Israel and Palestine. At its beginning in 1948, that tantalising phrase 'nerve centre of the world's religious life' offered a hint of interest in such questions – but it has never, so far as I am aware, been taken up and teased out further, at least at the level of WCC governance. Now, in the 2016 Central Committee there was this throw-away line about Christian Zionism, that was perhaps written in such a way because deeper exploration might be too painful or provocative. However in reality such a theological and religious dimension cannot be avoided: not least because whether one likes it or not, it impinges upon modern political realities. It was only a month after the conference at which this paper was originally offered that Mike Pence, the Vice-President of the United States gave a speech to the Israeli Knesset in which his politics influenced his religion, and vice versa. Pence's speech alone is a sign that Israel and Palestine continues to be, as it was said in that WCC statement 70 years ago, 'a nerve centre of the world's religious life.'

Appendix 1

World Council of Churches (WCC) Policy on Palestine and Israel 1948-2016 (summary)

This document is a summary and synthesis of policy positions on key issues pertaining to the situation in Palestine and Israel adopted by governing bodies of the World Council of Churches (WCC) from 1948 to 2016. It addresses major themes in these policy positions, but does not pretend to full comprehensiveness. The document has no official standing itself; for the official authoritative positions, the original policy documents referred to should be consulted directly.

Achieving a just peace under the rule of law is the best and only path towards ensuring the wellbeing and security of both Palestinians and Israelis. This is the core of WCC policy concerning the conflict. It is a conviction that has grown as 50 years of illegal occupation of Palestinian territory has claimed lives, denied human dignity and rights, distorted the futures of both peoples, and deepened the conflict between them. In developing its policy on these matters, the WCC is especially attentive to those who are most vulnerable and suffering, recognises the relevant UN resolutions as describing the basis for achieving peace with justice, and affirms that the Geneva Conventions determine the occupying power's responsibilities in the meantime. Policy is set by the WCC Assembly (WA), Central Committee (CC) and Executive Committee (EC). Key positions on Palestine and Israel, in brief, are as follows:

☐ Palestinians have the right of self-determination; their duly elected governmental authorities must be recognised; their refugees have the right of return and require a permanent solution. (EC 2006, WA 1998, CC 1990, WA 1983, EC 1974, CC 1969, WA 1968, CC 1967)

☐ Israel and its legitimate security needs are recognised, beginning with the state's emergence in 1948, to UN guarantees for its existence, in the right to protect its people under international law, and in guarantees for the territorial integrity of all nations in the area including Israel. (CC 2011, EC 2004, WA 1983, EC 1974, CC 1969, WA 1968, CC 1967, WA 1948)

☐ Violence in all its forms is condemned, whether perpetrated by the State of Israel inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories or by Palestinian armed groups inside the State of Israel. The conflict cannot be resolved through the use of force but only through peaceful means. WCC member churches are called to accompany and encourage the commitment to non-violence and active engagement in peace

negotiations. (CC 2016, CC 2009, EC 2009, EC 2006, EC 2004, CC 2002, EC 1993, WA 1983)

☒ Antisemitism is condemned. WCC calls upon all churches to denounce antisemitism, no matter what its origin, as irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith. Antisemitism is a sin against God and humanity. Criticism of the policies of the Israeli government is not in itself anti-Jewish. (WA 1983, WA 1948, CC 1992)

☒ WCC supports a two-state solution where Israelis and Palestinians live side by side within secure, recognised borders and share Jerusalem, as per UN Security Council resolutions. (CC 2009, EC 2004, CC 2002, WA 1998, EC 1993, CC 1990, WA 1983, EC 1974, CC 1967)

☒ Supporting the churches and indigenous Palestinian Christian presence and witness for peace in Palestine and Israel is a central priority for WCC and the ecumenical movement. The Christian faith has its historical roots in this land, and is nourished by the unbroken witness of the local churches who have their own roots in apostolic times. WCC seeks to reinforce a positive engagement by churches in the life of the nations to which they belong. Loss of the Christian presence would endanger inter-communal conviviality and peace. The future of Christian communities is increasingly threatened by Israeli settlement policies and violations of the fundamental rights of Palestinians. Local authorities must not interfere in internal church affairs. (CC 2016, CC 2011, EC 2006, CC 2002, WA 1998, CC 1990, WA 1983, WA 1975)

☒ The Kairos Palestine document is a call to the Palestinian Christian community to remain steadfast in their land, witnessing to God's love for all, while peacefully and creatively resisting the occupation. WCC member churches and the ecumenical movement are called to study and disseminate it, and listen and respond to the aspirations of Palestinian Christians expressed therein. (CC 2016, CC 2011)

☒ The occupation of the OPT since 1967 is illegal and must be ended. It is only through an end to the occupation and a just, comprehensive and lasting peace settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) can security of both Palestinians and Israelis be assured. Without an end to occupation, the cycle of violence continues. (CC 2016, CC 2006, EC 2004, CC 2002, EC 2001, WA 1983, WA 1968, CC 1967)

☒ Settlements in the OPT are illegal, as is their expansion. Such settlements are prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention, illegal, unjust, incompatible with peace, antithetical to the legitimate interests of the State of Israel, an obstacle to the two-state solution and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state – as affirmed by UN Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). Israeli settlers and soldiers must be withdrawn. A freeze on all settlement construction and expansion should be implemented, as a first step towards the dismantlement of all illegal settlements in the OPT. (CC 2011, CC 2009, CC 2002, EC 2001, WA 1983)

☒ Construction of the Separation Barrier in occupied Palestinian territory is illegal. It is a grave breach of international law and humanitarian law, and must be removed from occupied territory. (EC 2004, CC 2003)

☒ Certain economic measures are legitimate forms of non-violent resistance to occupation and positive pressure for peace. WCC supports an international boycott of goods and services from illegal Israeli settlements in the OPT. WCC considers targeted economic measures an important non-violent strategy for promoting peace and abating violence, and encourages member churches to avoid investments or other economic links to illegal activities on occupied territory. Member churches are encouraged to “thoughtfully and prayerfully consider how they might respond from the foundation of their faith” in their own contexts. (CC 2016, CC 2014, CC 2009, EC 2009, EC 2006, CC 2005, EC 2001, CC 2001)

☒ Jerusalem must be an open, inclusive and shared city for two peoples and three religions. The rights of its communities – Muslim, Jewish and Christian, Palestinian and Israeli – including access to Holy Places and freedom of worship, must be assured. WCC opposes the annexation of East Jerusalem and other unilateral actions altering the city’s geography and demography. The final status of Jerusalem must be agreed within the framework of international law and as part of a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement. Illegal settlements in and around Jerusalem – and restriction of Jerusalem residency rights – threaten this vision, pre-empting and obstructing negotiations for a comprehensive peace agreement. (CC 2009, EC 2006, EC 2000, WA 1998, WA 1983, CC 1980, WA 1975, CC 1974)

☐ The WCC supports groups on both sides working for peace and reconciliation, including inter-religious initiatives. (EC 2009, EC 2006, CC 2005, EC 2004, CC 2002, EC 1993, WA 1983)

☐ A just peace in Palestine and Israel is essential for peace in the world. Unresolved, this conflict generates instability in the region and insecurity in other regions. (EC 2006, CC 2002, WA 1998, CC 1979, CC 1969, CC 1967)

☐ Ecumenical accompaniment programme in Palestine and Israel (CC 2016, EC 2009, CC 2005, EC 2004, CC 2003, CC 2002, EC 2001)

☐ Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (CC 2016, CC 2009, EC 2009, CC 2008, CC 2006)

It is important to look at this list – in part because there is often confusion and misunderstandings about what are official WCC positions. There is a much wider range of WCC activities, meetings, conferences, consultations, study groups which regularly issue statements.

Appendix 2

Statement on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Peace Process (Central Committee)

28 June 2016

He has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. (Ephesians 2.14)

During this year – 2016 – the ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace focuses on the Middle East – the birthplace of some of the earliest human civilizations and of three world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam – and especially on Israel and Palestine, the land of Our Lord Jesus Christ's birth, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection. Our living faith has its roots in this land, nourished and nurtured by the unbroken witness of the local churches who have their own roots in apostolic times.

We are called during this year to reflect together on the situation of the churches and societies of this region, the threatened presence and witness of Christians throughout the Middle East, and on the long and unfulfilled search for peace with justice for Israelis and Palestinians, noting that next year – 2017 – will mark a painful anniversary: 50 years since Israel began its occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.

Throughout this period, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has sought to promote a durable solution out of a conviction that churches are duty bound to pray and work for an outcome as just as may be in the midst of our human disorder, recognizing that so long as underlying injustice persists there can be neither peace nor security for either Israelis or Palestinians.

Norms of international law and practice that bear upon this situation – relating to the conduct of armed conflict, protection of civilians, responsibilities and constraints upon an occupying power, the peaceful resolution of conflict, self-determination and human rights – have been so routinely ignored in the past decades that international law and international multilateral organizations have been undermined and weakened.

In the midst of violence and division, the ecumenical movement seeks to offer a word of hope, faith and love, encouraging and supporting actions for peace with justice. The WCC has maintained a consistent hope-filled objective and prayer – for equal justice for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Such hopes have risen and fallen with the fortunes of the intermittent ‘peace process’ in the region since at least the mid-1970s. They were raised high with the 1993/1995 Oslo Accords, which set in motion a process of negotiating a “two-state solution.” The WCC sought to encourage those hopes and the vision of two states coexisting side-by-side in peace, security and prosperity, so Israelis and Palestinians alike might enjoy the human dignity and rights to which all are equally entitled.

The WCC supports joint peace projects and dialogue between the peoples of Israel and Palestine and between their governments. We acknowledge with sadness the renewed bouts of conflict and violence in the region. The continuous and reinforced matrix of occupation, the building of the separation wall in many parts of occupied Palestine, the continued establishment of Israeli settlements, and the role of both Israeli and Palestinian extremists have repeatedly thwarted and frustrated hopes for a just and sustainable peace. The WCC has been deeply involved in efforts for Israeli-Palestinian peace since 1948 when the State of Israel was created and the WCC formally established. Even before 1948, the nascent WCC sought to help European Jews immigrate to safe havens, away from Nazi-occupied territories in Europe and assisted Palestinian refugees forced to leave their ancestral lands.

The WCC has consistently denounced the use of violence and acts of terror, whether by the State of Israel or by Palestinian groups and individuals. A just and sustainable peace cannot be secured by violence, which only begets more violence. In word and action, the WCC has consistently promoted dialogue and negotiation as providing the only viable path for a shared pilgrimage of justice and peace, in Israel-Palestine and throughout the world. In response to the reality of unimplemented peace plans and UN resolutions, the WCC has produced many statements and suggested several concrete actions. In 2002, the WCC established the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) to provide a concrete manifestation of **Christian** solidarity through active presence in the occupied Palestinian Territories. In 2007, the 'Amman Call' (issued by an international conference "Churches Together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East" convened by the WCC) launched the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) as an instrument to "catalyze and coordinate new and existing church advocacy... for peace and justice that serves all people of the region."

Against all the pressures of desperation, provocation and incitement to violence, the WCC has sought to encourage and accompany Palestinian people and communities, and member churches and partners throughout the world, in their efforts to resist occupation, including through economic measures such as divestment from companies profiting from the occupation and boycotting goods produced in illegal settlements on occupied territory. Such actions seek to advance the cause of peace with justice in Israel and Palestine through active non-violent means, using criteria rooted in faith.

With the breakdown of US-led peace efforts in 2014, the peace process established through the 1993/1995 Oslo Accords is widely regarded as having ended in failure. The international community's political will and commitment to efforts to revive the implementation of the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine have waned in the face of facts on the ground that render it unviable. Meanwhile, the political environment in Israel seems less and less conducive to the necessary compromises for a just peace. New initiatives have been proposed to restart the moribund peace process, including an international conference before the end of 2016. But hopes and expectations of such political initiatives are very low. The WCC itself has encountered aggressive attitudes and actions by the authorities of the State of Israel, with several WCC staff and representatives of member churches and partners seeking to enter Israel having recently been subjected to exceptionally aggressive,

intimidating and abusive interrogation and treatment, including detention for up to three days and deportation.

Hope's end is not a foundation for peace, least of all a just peace. Rather, it is dangerous and fertile terrain for desperate and violent acts, fuelling the extremism now plaguing the entire Middle East. Continued and expanded occupation is corrosive and destructive for the moral and political capacities of both Israelis and Palestinians. If the conflict is not transformed through a just, durable solution, people will continue to die and suffer, their human dignity be diminished, and international law and institutions be further delegitimized.

In this context, and with these concerns, the WCC central committee, meeting in Trondheim, Norway, 22-28 June 2016:^{vi}

1. ***Calls on*** Israeli and Palestinian leaders to actively and immediately pursue the implementation of a just, viable and sustainable solution to the conflict, by providing a political horizon for an end to occupation and for a just and sustainable peace for both Palestinians and Israelis.
1. ***Urges*** all members of the international community – in particular the Quartet (United Nations, European Union, USA and Russian Federation) – to resume active, determined and consistent efforts to help build such a political horizon for peace with justice between Israelis and Palestinians.
1. ***Calls on*** WCC member churches, specialized ministries and ecumenical partners to be louder voices and more active agents in countering despair and rebuilding hope, in particular through supporting and sustaining the presence and witness of local **Christians** and member churches in Israel and Palestine, by
 - a) listening to and responding to the voices of Palestinian **Christians** (including those expressed through the 'Kairos Palestine' document);
 - b) taking active steps to encourage a continued robust indigenous **Christian** presence in the Holy Land;
 - c) promoting and supporting all non-violent efforts to end the occupation (including considering appropriate economic and other measures); and
 - d) intensifying inter-faith dialogue and cooperation with Jewish and Muslim partners on the pilgrimage of justice and peace.
1. ***Invites*** renewed and redoubled engagement with the vision of a just peace for Palestinians and Israelis where all live with justice, equal rights, dignity and inclusive

security, strong church participation in the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) – the leading common ecumenical ministry of accompaniment and witness for justice in the region, and through the member churches of the WCC and the Palestine and Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF).

1. ***Calls on*** WCC member churches, specialized ministries and ecumenical partners to recognize the danger of using scripture to in any way justify occupation, and to recognize **Christian Zionism** as a form of **Christian** fundamentalism endangering especially indigenous Palestinian **Christian** communities.
1. ***Expresses*** its concern regarding efforts in legislative bodies throughout the world to silence and penalize calls for non-violent measures to resist illegal occupation, but rather reiterates its support for freedom of expression in all contexts and non-violent means for transforming conflicts.
1. ***Recommends*** that the WCC convene an international ecumenical conference in 2017, marking the 50th anniversary of the occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights, 100 years since the Balfour Declaration, and the 10th anniversary of the 'Amman Call', in order to reaffirm and strengthen ecumenical witness for peace with justice for Israelis and Palestinians.
1. ***Supports*** church leaders in their difficult role to maintain and strengthen the **christian** presence in the middle east, cradle of **christianity**.

ⁱ The 1948 Lambeth Conference resolution is as follows:
Resolution 16

The Church and the Modern World - Palestine

The Conference feels deep concern for the future of Palestine: it prays that good order and peace may be restored to the land sacred to millions of Christians as well as to Muslims and Jews. It greatly appreciates the efforts made to restore peace and expresses its sympathy with all of every race, and particularly Christians of every Church, who are suffering.

The Conference appeals to the nations of the world to deal with the problem and spiritual question that touches a nerve centre of the world's religious life. And for that reason it urges the United Nations to place Jerusalem and its immediate environs under permanent international control, with freedom of access to sacred places secured for the adherents of the three religions.

ⁱⁱ It has often been noted how in the text of *Nostra Aetate*, for example, that Judaism is essentially described from a Christian standpoint, whereas the description of Islam and other religions seek to express the religion, albeit very briefly, in a way that is recognisable by its adherents.

ⁱⁱⁱ The 1992 Central Committee statement *Christian-Jewish Dialogue beyond Canberra '91* is perhaps an exception here, since it does refer to the earlier 1988 'Sigtuna' document which had spoken of Judaism as a

‘living tradition’. However the 1992 Central Committee report chooses the somewhat ambiguous word ‘appreciates’ when it discusses the implications of the Sigtuna document.

^{iv} The exception in my view is the remarks about the Kairos Palestine document, where statements like this at Central Committee create an unhelpful ambiguity as to whether the Kairos Palestine document is an official WCC document or not.

^v For example a consultation in Bern in 2008, and the Global Theological Platform (also in 2008) in which I myself participated

^{vi} The numbering below in this document reflects the numbering as the document currently (13 Feb 2018) appears on the WCC website. Ideally some corrections to the numbering system of the document need to be made