

**Methodist Conference and Council Reports and Resolutions on
Israel / Palestine
2002 – 2009**

2002 Methodist Conference

Notice of Motion 19: The Holy Land

The Methodist Conference:

- sends warm Christian greetings to sisters and brothers in the Holy Land at this time of great suffering, assuring them of our prayers and earnest desire for justice and peace for all God's children;
- encourages Methodist people, wherever practicable, to pilgrimage to The Holy Land, not only to walk where Jesus walked but to meet the people who love Him today;
- urges churches to send desperately needed medical relief and humanitarian aid (e.g. to hospitals, clinics and schools) through the Methodist Relief and Development Fund; Christian Aid; Medical Aid for Palestinians; and other agencies.
- directs a letter be sent outlining the above to: the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem via their Co-ordinator, The Very Reverend Michael Sellors, Dean of St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre via the Reverend Canon Naim Ateek, Jerusalem, The Middle East Council of Churches via The Jerusalem Office.

The Conference adopted the motion.

2002 Methodist Council

Daily Record 8/16 of the Methodist Conference 2002 and The Middle East: A Methodist Response to the matters arising for British and Irish Churches' from CTBI Report, 'Who is my neighbour?'

In line with the recommendation of the February 2002 Methodist Council Meeting a small ad hoc group was brought together to discuss and formulate a draft Methodist response on the Middle East. This meeting took place on the 4th March and the following were present:

Paul Renshaw (International Affairs, CTBI), Elizabeth Harris (Secretary for Inter-faith relations in the Connexional Team) and Jennifer Potter (International Affairs Secretary in the Connexional Team). It was not possible in the short time available to have other people present at the meeting but Charles Reed (Church of England), Ann Davison (Chelmsford Diocese) and Ian White (Cliff College) were all consulted by phone and email.

It was felt that, despite the severe worsening of the situation in the Middle East, the Notice of Motion of Conference 2001 still provides the basis for the Methodist position:

Notice of Motion 17 Holy Land (as amended by N of M 43)

The Conference is deeply disturbed by the continuing pain of the peoples of the Holy Land and, in particular, the inhumane and unjust treatment of ordinary citizens and the terror of random violence.

Recognising that peace and security can only be achieved when international judgements are respected and justice is done, Conference:

Directs that letters of affectionate greetings be sent to the leaders of the churches in Jerusalem and the Sabeel Ecumenical Centre, expressing solidarity with the Palestinian and Israeli organisations working for relief, human rights and a just peace.

Directs the Connexional Team to seek clarification from the newly elected British Government on:

- a) its position in relation to human rights and injustice in Israel/Palestine, with reference to all ethnic groups including the Bedouin tribes of the Negev, and
- b) how Britain is exerting its influence to promote the implementation of
 - The Fourth Geneva Convention (the occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies)
 - UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1322 which terminate illegal occupation
 - The return and compensation of all refugees, who so choose in accordance with UN Resolution 194
 - A status for Jerusalem which will enable access to holy sites for all.

In summary the Methodist position is that a return to the borders of 1967 and a status for Jerusalem as a place for two nations and three faiths, with parity of esteem, is the real basis upon which trust could be built up among the different communities. The desire for a lasting peace can only be based on trust, security and freedom from fear for all people in the area.

Suggestions for Practical Responses from the Methodist Church

That the Connexional Team:

- Continue, with ecumenical partners, discussions with HMG about the situation in Israel/Palestine.
- Make information available on prayer and prayer vigil resources across the Connexion.
- Wherever possible, in the light of the security situation, urge Methodists to continue to visit fellow Christians in the region/
- Whenever the security improves, encourage pilgrimages, which include visits to Christian communities and other faith groups in Israel/Palestine.
- Encourage involvement, at both local and national level, in inter-faith initiatives directed at Israel/Palestine particularly encouraging links between young people from different faith communities in Britain to their counterparts.
- Encourage people to be willing to listen to and nurture contacts with organisations / individuals from the three religions of Israel/Palestine.

- Collect information from around the Connexion about existing links between Churches and circuits in Britain and Churches or projects in Israel/Palestine and make the information more widely known.
- Inform Methodists about the MRDF and Christian Aid involvement in projects in Israel/Palestine and encourage the support of these.

In order that the Connexional Team itself be as well resourced as possible for work on Israel/Palestine it is proposed that:

- A more co-ordinated pattern of working be developed among those dealing with the region – namely the World Church Area Secretary for Europe and the Middle East, the Secretary for Inter-faith Relations and the Secretary for International Affairs.
- Efforts are made to ensure that ecumenical links are maintained and enhanced especially through the Middle East Forum of the CCOM (Churches' Commission on Mission) of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland).
- The Council is asked also to note that a World Council of Churches (WCC) Programme is being developed to send people from churches around the world to accompany the people of Israel/Palestine in their daily struggle to be able to live without fear and intimidation. This Programme is known as the WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). The Council is also asked to affirm that information about this programme be made available to Methodist Churches so that individual Methodists who are interested to become involved, may do so.

[This Programme aims to send mature and experienced people from the churches to partners in Israel/Palestine for periods of not less than 3 months. Their role would be to monitor and report violations of human rights, offer protection through non-violent presences and to be advocates especially on their return.]

Extract from Methodist Council Minute April 2002

“The Council engaged in discussion, recognising the Church's unique role taking seriously its responsibility of engaging with the theological issues at the heart of the Middle East conflict. The Methodist Council's Chaplain, The Revd Roger Bidnell, led the Council in prayer. It was agreed that The Revd Alan Ashton would convey a message back to the Jerusalem church leaders on behalf of the Council to assure them of the prayers of the Methodist people, and to indicate that the Methodist people are being encouraged to engage with the issues and to support all that makes for peace, reconciliation and justice in Palestine/Israel.”

The Council agreed to recommend MC/02/61 to the Conference, incorporating a further resolution to be formulated by The Revds Peter Sulston and David Deeks about the need for the theological work in dialogue with other faiths, already undertaken by the Secretary for Inter-Faith Relations, to be further developed. The Council also agreed that the Methodist Church website be used to keep members of the Church informed of the situation through the reports received from other churches and contacts in the Middle East region.

The First Alexandria Declaration of the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land

In the Name of God who is Almighty, Merciful and Compassionate, we, who have gathered as religious leaders from the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities, pray

for true peace in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and declare our commitment to ending the violence and bloodshed that denies the right to life and dignity.

According to our faith traditions, killing innocents in the name of God is a desecration of his Holy Name, and defames religion in the world. The violence in the Holy Land is an evil which must be opposed by all people of good faith. We seek to live together as neighbours, respecting the integrity of each other's historical and religious inheritance.

We call upon all to oppose incitement, hatred and the misrepresentation of the other.

The Holy Land is Holy to all three of our faiths. Therefore, followers of the divine religions must respect its sanctity, and bloodshed must not be allowed to pollute it. The sanctity and integrity of the Holy Places must be preserved, and freedom of religious worship must be ensured for all.

Palestinians and Israelis must respect the divinely ordained purposes of the Creator by whose grace they live in the same land that is called Holy.

We call on the political leaders of both parties to work for a just, secure and durable solution in the spirit of the words of the Almighty and the Prophets.

As a first step now, we call for a religiously sanctioned cease-fire, respected and observed on all sides, and for the implementation of the Mitchell and Tenet recommendations, including the lifting of restrictions and a return to negotiations.

We seek to help create an atmosphere where present and future generations will co-exist with mutual respect and trust in the other. We call on all to refrain from incitement and demonisation, and to educate our future generations accordingly.

As religious leaders, we pledge ourselves to continue a joint quest for a just peace that leads to reconciliation in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, for the common good of all our peoples.

We announce the establishment of a permanent joint committee to carry out the recommendations of the declaration, and to engage with our respective political leadership accordingly.

2003 Methodist Conference

29. Methodist Council (3) B. THE HOLY LAND

Daily Record 8/16: Methodist Conference 2002:

The Conference, recognising that the variety of theologies of the Holy Land in the three Abrahamic faiths is a critical issue behind the conflict in Israel/Palestine, encourages the Connexional Team to enquire into work being done by ecumenical and inter-faith groups on this theme and to enable resources for discussion to be distributed in the Church as appropriate.

Summary

A major dissonance between the parties to the conflict in the Holy Land exists in the importance given to theology when the question of the Land is considered. Theology plays a major part within Jewish perspectives and within some Christian perspectives. It does not, however, play such a large part within Muslim perspectives. For many Muslims, the question of the Land is not theological but political, in spite of the importance of Jerusalem within Muslim religious narrative. This partly explains the lack of Muslim input in the material surveyed below.

Ecumenical Christian Groups

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has hosted two Jewish-Christian-Muslim colloquia on Jerusalem. The first of these was held in 1993. It was supported by the WCC, the General Secretariat of the Lutheran World Federation, the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. The Final Communiqué of this was published in *Current Dialogue* 24, June 1993: pp.10-12. The second was held in 1996 with the title, *The Responsibility of Jews, Christians and Muslims for Peace in Jerusalem*. See *Current Dialogue* 30 : pp. 1-17 for the Christian and Jewish contributions. The Muslim contribution was not ready for this issue of *Current Dialogue* and has not yet appeared. The Leuenberg Fellowship has produced a Report entitled *The Church and Israel*. The main focus of this is the relationship between Christians and Jews rather than the State of Israel.

Sharing One Hope? The Church of England and Christian –Jewish Relations was published by the Inter Faith Consultative Group of the Archbishop's Council in 2001. Chapter 5 is entitled "The State of Israel" (p. 14-16). This does little more than recognise that the State of Israel is a divisive issue for the Church because of different theological views concerning the Land.

Colin Chapman, an Anglican, had published a third edition of his 1983 publication, *Whose Promised Land?* (Lion Publishing, Oxford, 2002). This contains expanded biblical material and a new section on "Appreciating the Issues Today". As a scholar well-read in Islamic Studies and with in-depth experience of the Middle East, Chapman provides one of the most useful resources from a Christian perspective.

Jewish-Christian and Jewish Initiatives

The Centre for Jewish-Christian Relationships in Cambridge offers a course entitled "Land of Promise", led by Dr George Wilkes, within its MA. This includes Jewish, Christian and Muslim perspectives on the Land of Israel/Palestine. The bibliography for three sessions is available below. The lack of material from Muslim sources is noticeable.

The Council of Christians and Jews has not done detailed work on the issue of the Land of Israel/Palestine. Within the present crisis, however, it is working with organisations in Israel that bring together Jews and Muslims as joint 'owners' of the Land, for example the Galilee Bus Project (to buy a bus that will become a multi-cultural educational programming unit) and Merchavim, an NGO that runs educational programmes with shared citizenship approach. Its staff, however, particularly Rabbi Jonathon Gorsky, are equipped to help Jews and Christians think through issues connected with the theology of the Land.

The International Council of Christians and Jews offer a variety of study resources, but none of the current resources advertised on their website relate particularly to the holy 'Land'. See www.jcrelations.net

Dabru Emet, published in 2001, was "A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity", from the National Jewish Scholars Project (USA). It contains eight brief statements about how Jews and Christians may relate to one another. One of these is: "Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel". This statement has caused difficulty for some Christians.

Inter Faith Initiatives

The International Interfaith Centre in Oxford (IIC) has long-established contact with several grassroots organisations in Israel/Palestine that are working towards practical reconciliation and understanding concerning the Land. Among these are: Neve Shalom (a village in Israel established jointly by Jews and Palestinians); the Tantur Institute; and the Interfaith Encounter Association, Jerusalem. The emphasis of these organisations and the IIC is on conflict transformation through encounter, and the building of understanding and trust between communities. This would be the emphasis of a number of other international inter faith organisations such as: The World Conference on Religion and Peace and A Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

Initiatives in Israel/Palestine

Organisations such as the Israel Interfaith Association and the Inter-religious Co-ordination Council in Israel emphasise reconciliation and co-existence through developing mutual understanding. The issue of the Land, even the theology of the Land, is seen to be political and therefore avoided.

St George's College, Jerusalem (PO Box 1248, Jerusalem 910000) has developed a course entitled *Abraham, Yesterday and Today*, which focuses on Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Holy Land. This includes material on theologies of the Land.

The Sabeel Liberation Theology Centre concentrates on working for a just peace for Israel and Palestine. It tends to see the issue of Land as a political one and therefore concentrates on political processes, using the insights of liberation theology. The Middle East Council of Churches places emphasis on co-existence and co-operation with other faiths/ Its current website advertises no specific material on theologies of the Land, but its journals could be searched for such material.

***RESOLUTION

29/2. The Conference receives the Report.

Notice of Motion 43: The Holy Land [See preceding report]

Conference receives the report as an initial response to Daily Record 8/16 of Conference 2002.

In the light of all that has happened in the Middle East in the last year, Conference directs the Methodist Council in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee and the Inter-Faith Relations Committee to do further work to identify a greater diversity of theologies and resources which are easily accessible and available for local churches. Conference directs that a further report be brought to the Conference of 2004 which includes proposals on how resources for discussion (and information about them) are to be distributed in the Church, such as the Connexional Link Mailing.

The Conference adopted the motion.

Notice of Motion 44: Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza

In view of the desperate humanitarian plight of Palestinians living in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza, the Conference:

- Urges all Methodist people to support urgent medical and food relief (especially through agencies such as The Biblelands Society and Christian Aid; and
- Expressing its great dismay at the destruction wrought on the Palestinian economy, urges the Department for International Development and the European Union to contribute further to the economic reconstruction of Palestine, in the knowledge that the Methodist people are also giving direct support.

The Conference adopted the motion.

2004 Methodist Conference

44. The Holy Land

The Conference in 2003 adopted the following resolution:

29/2. The Conference receives the Report as an initial response to Daily Record 8/16 of Conference 2002.

In the light of all that has happened in the Middle East in the last year, Conference directs the Methodist Council in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee and the Inter-Faith Relations Committee to do further work to identify a greater diversity of theologies and resources which are easily accessible and available for local churches. Conference directs that a further report be brought to the Conference of 2004 which includes proposals on how resources for discussion (and information about them) are to be distributed in the Church, such as the Connexional Link Mailing.

Report to Conference of 2004

A working group of people with specialist knowledge and/or a declared interest in Israel/Palestine was brought together for the first time in March 2004.

The remit for the group is:

- To develop an awareness of currently available theological resources
- To reflect upon the quality and content of such resources in the context of the developing political situation in Israel/Palestine
- To identify gaps in the type and scope of resources that are available
- To investigate ways of developing resources to meet unmet need
- To suggest methods of making such resources available to local churches
- To report to the Conference in 2005

In 2003 the World Church Office initiated a partnership with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) and will provide a financial contribution over three years. Volunteer Ecumenical Accompaniers support Palestinians and Israelis in their non-violent actions and concerted advocacy efforts to end the occupation. The programme operates under the auspices of the World Council of Churches and is supported by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

44/1. The Conference notes the establishment of the Israel/Palestine Working Group and directs that a further report be brought to the 2005 Conference.

44/2. The Conference affirms the partnership of the World Church Office and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Israel and Palestine.

2005 Methodist Conference

26. The Holy Land

In 2003, by Notice of Motion 43, the Conference asked for a greater diversity of resources on the Holy Land to be made available.

Part of the response to the Notice of Motion was the drawing together of The Holy Land Reference Group. The Group has sought a balanced membership in order to offer a variety of perspectives. Current members are:

The Revd Alan Ashton
The Revd Nichola G Jones
The Revd Hazel M Forecast
The Revd Peter G Sulston
Dr Elizabeth Harris
Ms Christine Elliot
Mr Steve Hucklesby
Anthea Cox

The Group membership will vary depending on changing circumstances and work programmes, and is keen to hear from others interested in Israel/Palestine. Contact plsj@methodsitchurch.org.uk.

The Group meets periodically, and will:

- Gather together from across the Connexion accounts of Methodist links with partners in Israel and Palestine and make this available via the Methodist website;
- Explore the possibility of commissioning bible study material (identified as a gap in current resources);
- Continue to participate in and learn from inter-faith dialogue regarding Israel/Palestine.

The Holy Land Reference Group has given consideration to the resources already available and attempted to identify where there are gaps in such information. The Reference Group believes that any work to provide new resources should be undertaken ecumenically and is mindful of the *Priorities for the Methodist Church*.

The Reference Group will continue to develop a web-based guide to available resources.

The initial work of the Reference Group has led the Group to an understanding that the theological and political issues around Israel/Palestine should be a component in the training programmes of the Methodist Church.

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) received further grant support in 2005-06 from the Fund for World Mission.

The Revd Brian Shackleton, Pickering Circuit, served as an Ecumenical Accompanier for three months from December 2004. He was present during the elections for the President of the Palestinian Authority. He is available to speak to District gatherings and Synods. The experiences of Ecumenical Accompaniers will be communicated through Methodist media.

The Connexional Team have liaised with Christian Aid in the production of *One Land, Many Voices*. This Report contrasts the perspectives of replacement theology, Christian Zionism and liberation theology.

Anthea Cox, Co-ordinating Secretary for Public Life and Social Justice, was part of an ecumenical delegation led by Christian Aid to Israel/Palestine in March 2005.

The Connexional Team will continue to work with ecumenical partners through the CTBI Middle East Forum and in other ways to devise appropriate responses to a dynamic situation.

***RESOLUTION

26/1. The Conference receives the Report.

Memorial 28 - Use of Funds in Relation to Conflict in Israel and Palestine

The York and Hull Synod (R) (Present: 188. Voting: 187 in favour, 0 against) wishes to take up the call of the World Council of Churches to encourage genuine efforts for peace and justice between the Israelis and Palestinians based upon International Law. The Synod notes the statement of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), made in February 2005, to all its member Churches "with investment funds, that they have an opportunity to use these funds responsibly in support of peaceful solutions". It further notes the WCC endorsement of the action of the Presbyterian Church of the USA, to divest from any multinational corporations involved in the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It further notes the call of the "Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions" for such divestment to take place. The Synod therefore calls on the Conference, as a member of the WCC and as part of its commitment to ethical investment, to undertake a review of all investments under its control, with a view to divesting from any corporations or activities which support the illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It further calls on the Conference to publicise this stance through appropriate channels.

Background statement provided by the York and Hull Synod:

Despite recent hopes for peace, the Israeli Government is continuing certain illegal activities in the Occupied Territories, which are unhelpful to an equitable negotiated settlement. Despite the ruling of the International Court of Justice in July 2004, on the illegality of the Wall/Barrier it is building in the West Bank, it continues to build the said Wall, causing great suffering to innocent Palestinians. Despite its offer to withdraw illegal settlers in Gaza, the Israeli Government has shown no willingness to dismantle its major settlements in the West Bank, the existence of which breaks the 4th Geneva Convention. Israel's recent announcement of its intention to build over 3000 new houses in the major settlement of Maale Adumim is a further illegal action, which is unhelpful to peace. This calls into question Israel's intention ever to withdraw fully from the West Bank, the occupation of which breaks UN Security Council Resolution 242.

Reply of the 2005 Conference

The Conference notes the call of the York and Hull District for disinvestment from corporations or activities which support the illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Conference is mindful of the adoption of the Notice of Motion in 2003 acknowledging the desperate plight of Palestinians living in the occupied territories.

Responding to the adoption of the resolution of the Presbyterian Church USA General Assembly, the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) has published its strategy for phased selective disinvestment. MRTI will compile a listing of multinational corporations operating in Israel and Palestine based on the following criteria:

Multinational corporations that:

- provide products or services to or for use by the Israeli police or military to support and maintain the occupation.
- provide products, services, or technology of particular strategic importance to the support and maintenance of the occupation.
- have established facilities or operations on occupied land.
- provide products or services, including financial services, for the establishment, expansion or maintenance of Israeli settlements.
- provide products and services, including financial services, to Israeli or Palestinian organisations/groups that support or facilitate violent acts against innocent civilians.
- provide products or services, including financial services, that support or facilitate the construction of the Separation Barrier.

The Conference notes that the Presbyterian Church USA proposes progressive engagement with companies involving conversations that encourage “open and honest dialogue about the companies’ involvement”. Further engagement strategies could also be employed over a period of time and MRTI would only consider recommending disinvestment to the General Assembly if no positive results consistent with the General Assembly criteria and the MRTI classification process were attained.

The mission of the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church of Great Britain (CFB) states an aim to construct investment portfolios that are consistent with the moral stance and teachings of the Christian faith. This has resulted in the investment decisions of the CFB being guided by biblical principles such as encouraging a concern for the vulnerable and oppressed. It also seeks to provide a voice through which socially concerned investors can be heard and engages in constructive dialogue with company managements, challenging them to make social justice a growing influence in their decision-making process.

The Conference welcomes the challenges brought to its attention by the York and Hull District Synod but recognises the need to distinguish between strategies for blanket disinvestment, phased selected disinvestment and corporate engagement. The Conference therefore refers the Memorial to the Joint Advisory Committee for Ethical Investment (JACEI) to consider in conjunction with ecumenical partners, advise the CFB accordingly and report to the Conference in 2006. [Please see below for the reply of the 2006 Conference]

2006 Methodist Conference

4. Use of Funds in Relation to Conflict in Israel and Palestine (Memorial 28 2005) [Please refer to the Memorial and reply to the 2005 Conference above]

Report to the 2006 Conference

The Methodist Council has considered this Memorial further, and now recommends that the Conference adopts the following:

- 1) The Conference acknowledges the background statement accompanying M28 brought to the 2005 Conference by the York and Hull District.

The Conference welcomes the Government of Israel's disengagement from settlements in Gaza in 2005 but expresses deep concerns over continued settlement and road development in the West Bank. This expansion continues in defiance of Security Council Resolution 242 and in contravention of the July 2004 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on the legality of such action. Continued settlement construction represents a significant impediment to the process of negotiating a peaceful resolution in Israel and Palestine and may additionally threaten the viability of a two state solution.

- 2) As a new administration takes control of the Palestinian Authority and the people of Israel prepare for elections, the Conference:
 - a) calls on the Government of Israel to cease all further settlement and road expansion in the West Bank and to halt the construction of the security barrier that is dividing Palestinian communities, depriving people of agricultural land and denying Palestinians access to health care.
 - b) calls on all Palestinian groups to recognise the State of Israel and to seek peaceful means to bring to an end the occupation.
 - c) urges the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to find ways to reduce tension and to persist in the search for a solution that guarantees the rights of all.
- 3) In line with Memorial 28 2005, the Methodist Council has invited a report from the Joint Advisory Committee on Ethics of Investment (JACEI) to:
 - a) determine the key concerns that would inform constructive engagement with companies;
 - b) establish how these concerns might best be taken forward with companies in which the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church (CFB) has a shareholding;
 - c) identify the criteria that should guide the CFB in a progressive policy that begins with constructive engagement related to these key concerns but which could ultimately lead to selective disinvestment. Such criteria should also be applied to potential new investments.

- 4) The Methodist Conference acknowledges the role played by the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme to Palestine and Israel and the links of many Methodist ministers and churches with Israeli and Palestinian groups. It encourages the Connexional Team to continue to liaise with Circuits and Districts and engage Jewish and Muslim groups and ecumenical partners on these issues.

*****RESOLUTION**

4/1. The Conference adopts the report as its further reply to Memorial 28 2005.

Notice of Motion 100 - Humanitarian Needs are Paramount

Current suspension of aid to Palestinians is deepening poverty levels – the UN predicts 74% of the population living on less than £1.10 a day in two years. Palestinian society is on the brink of collapse, with vital health and education services at risk. The ‘Quartet’ (United States, European Union, Russia and United Nations) needs to act impartially: if conditions are to be applied, they should be done so to whichever party breaks agreed accords or international law. Without impartiality towards both communities, the ability of the EU and other Quartet powers to encourage a solution based on two meaningful and viable states will be compromised.

Israel unilaterally ‘disengaged’ from the Gaza Strip last August, but it continues to control the territory’s borders, airspace and coastline. Hence the beach rocket attacks a couple of weeks ago. Palestinians in Gaza are suffering food shortages and 80% unemployment because of occupation and not natural disaster.

In view of these desperate situations and the plight of Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank and in Gaza, the Conference:

Urges the Methodist people, as a matter of extreme urgency, to support medical and food relieve through agencies such as Christian Aid, World Vision, The Biblelands Society, Methodist Relief & Development Fund.

Calls on the Government of Israel, in line with its obligations under the Oslo Accords and Paris Protocol, to immediately transfer Palestinian tax revenues (up to US\$60million a month) to the Palestinian Authority in order that staff in hospitals, schools and other institutions (not paid for the past 3 to 4 months) can be paid and so relieve the intense pressure many people are under.

Requests that the UK Government gives a clear statement that only negotiations based on UN resolutions and international law, not unilateral moves by Israel, can bring lasting peace to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Suggests that in praying for the Holy Land we should ask God that – “HOPE will take place of despair. JUSTICE will prevail over oppression. PEACE will turn strife into love.”

2007 Methodist Conference

Notice of Motion 4 - Humanitarian needs remain paramount

Recalling Notice of Motion 100, passed in 2006, Conference restates its concern at the increasingly desperate humanitarian situation facing the Palestinian people. A recent UN Report says that over 80% of the population of Gaza and 56% of the people of the West Bank live below the official poverty line of US\$2.10 per day. It states that two thirds of all Palestinian households “are dependent on food aid and are unable to provide for their basic needs”. A recent World Bank Report states that the current economic crisis facing the Palestinians is due to Israeli restrictions on movement and access – many of which cannot be explained as due to Israeli security needs. Furthermore, the UN states, Israel continues to build the Separation Wall, settlements and roads for its own citizens, whilst demolishing Palestinian homes and infrastructure, all in defiance of the 4th Geneva Convention and other International legal statutes.

Mindful of Resolutions that Conference has adopted in recent years expressing concern at the plight of Palestinians living under Occupation, noting the deteriorating humanitarian crisis faced by the Palestinian people in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and recognising the legitimate security fears of both Israelis and Palestinians, the Conference:

- Rejoices at the recent safe release of Alan Johnston and welcomes the part played in securing his release by the Hamas movement.
- Calls for an end to violence by all sides and for explicit acceptance by both Hamas and the Government of Israel of the right to peace, security and prosperity for all Israelis and Palestinians.
- Calls on the Government of Israel to remove all those restrictions it has placed on the Palestinian economy which are against International law and accept the need for the Palestinian Authority to spend the tax revenues that Israel collects on its behalf under the Paris Protocol, throughout the Palestinian Territories, including the Gaza Strip.
- Calls on the UK Government and other members of the Quartet (United States, European Union, Russia and the United Nations) to act impartially to ensure that International Law is upheld by both sides and specifically to ensure that the 4th Geneva Convention, which governs how an Occupying power should behave towards an occupied people, is enforced.
- Urges the UK Government, as a matter of urgency, to work with the Palestinian Authority to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, including those in the Gaza Strip, are alleviated and their economy developed.
- Urges the Methodist people, to continue their support of medical and food relief through agencies such as Christian Aid, World Vision, The Biblelands Society, Methodist Relief and Development Fund and Medical Aid for Palestinians.
- Encourages the Methodist people to express their ongoing concern for peace and justice both by visiting the Occupied Territories and by joining

with groups, such as those of the “Enough” coalition, who are campaigning for an end to the Occupation.

May we be part of the answer to our prayers that hope would take the place of despair and that justice would prevail over oppression, for all the peoples of the Holy Land.

2008 Methodist Conference

Notice of Motion 5 – Situation in Gaza

Conference restates its deep concern over the desperate levels of poverty being experienced within Palestinian society, particularly regarding the Gaza Strip and the blockade that Israel has imposed. A recent report co-sponsored by 8 development and human rights agencies, including Christian Aid, Save the Children and Amnesty International, described the situation in Gaza as a “humanitarian implosion”. It states that “80% of families in Gaza currently rely on humanitarian aid compared to 63% in 2006”. It furthermore reports that the blockade “is destroying public service infrastructure in Gaza” and is resulting in hospitals experiencing power cuts lasting 8-12 hours a day.

Consistent with resolutions that Conference has adopted in recent years such as Notice of Motion 100 in 2006 and Notice of Motion 4 in 2007, expressing concern at the plight of Palestinians living under occupation and recognising that both Israelis and Palestinians should be able to live in peace and security, the Conference:

- a) Expresses both its encouragement that the Israeli Government and Hamas, under the mediation of Egypt, were recently able to agreed a ceasefire and its hope that it will continue.
- b) Calls for a process of peacemaking that eschews violent conflict and warmly commends the “Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel” run by the World Council of Churches.
- c) Joins with Christian Aid, Save the Children, Amnesty and the other sponsors of the above report in calling on Israel to end its blockade of Gaza and to ask the UK and EU “to exert greater pressure on the Government of Israel to open its crossings in Gaza”.
- d) Calls on Methodists to write to their MPs and MEPs to demand urgent action to alleviate the humanitarian crisis facing the people of Gaza and to pray for peace and justice for all God’s people in the Holy Land.
- e) Urges the President and Vice-President to bring this urgent concern to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary.

2009 Methodist Conference

Notice of Motion 226 – Israel/Palestine Working Group

Bearing in mind the events of the last 8 months, including the Gaza War and Israeli incursions; the deteriorating conditions of occupation under which Palestinians are forced to live and their request for Christians in the West to visit them and to speak out on their behalf, Conference resolves:

- i) as a matter of urgency to establish a Methodist working group facilitated by the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), to bring to Conference 2010, a statement of the Methodist Church's position on Israel/Palestine, taking into account past resolutions of Conference and international law;
- ii) that the Proposer, The Revd Nichola G Jones, and Seconder, Dr Stephen Leah, be part of the working group.