



OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

J. HERBERT NELSON, II
STATED CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A message to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the community at large :

The 225th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), held in a hybrid format from June 18 to July 9, passed overture INT-02 titled “On Recognition That Israel’s Laws, Policies, and Practices Constitute Apartheid Against the Palestinian People.” This resolution follows a series of policies enacted by previous General Assemblies since 1948. Since then, the PC(USA) has passed resolutions strongly supporting the right of Israel to exist within the internationally recognized pre-1967 borders and emphatically condemning violence against civilians by all parties. The church affirms that Israel and all nations have the right to provide security for their citizens by taking appropriate measures that are consistent with international law.

The PC(USA) has also, through resolutions, strongly supported the right of Palestine to be an independent and sovereign state within the pre-1967 borders, the right of return to refugees or a negotiated compensation, the removal of all illegal Israel settlements in occupied Palestinian territories or a 1:1 swap of land, a shared Jerusalem, an end to Israel’s military occupation of Palestinian territories, either the total removal of the Separation Wall or the removal of those portions of the wall that are on Palestinian land, and equal rights for Palestinians who are citizens of Israel.

As the situation on the ground deteriorated, the 2016 General Assembly stated: “Without repudiating a long-term goal of two free states living in peace and prosperity, or losing hope that the United States can use its influence and considerable funds in a proportionate and helpful way, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) hopes to act with both integrity and effectiveness, seeking enforcement of international law and solidarity with civil society organizations to protect the individual and collective human rights of Palestinians. As stated by the General Assembly in 2010, “We do affirm the legitimacy of Israel as a state, but consider the continuing occupation of Palestine ... to be illegitimate, illegal under international law, and an enduring threat to peace in the region. Furthermore, we recognize that any support for that occupation weakens the moral standing of our nation internationally and our security.”

In 2018, Israel passed a nation-state law, which declares the distinction between Jews and non-Jews fundamental and legitimate, and permits institutional discrimination in land management and development, housing, citizenship, language and culture. This decision among many other practices have confirmed that the policies and practices of Israel constitute apartheid. According to the Rome Statute, the International Criminal Court defines the crime of apartheid as “inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them.”

Declaring it apartheid, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) joins a growing chorus — including B’Tselem, Israel’s most respected human rights organization; Jewish Voice for Peace; Amnesty International; Michael Lynk, the former U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967; and Human Rights Watch, who internationally monitors rights abuses, declaring in 2021 that the crime of

apartheid exists in Israel and the West Bank. But most significantly, the Palestinian Christian community in its Cry for Hope calls us to act, saying: “The body of Christ can no longer stand by as world leaders and the international community trample on the rights of Palestinians, both Christian and Muslim, under international law.”

We are aware that this decision will affect some of our interfaith relations, especially with a portion of the American Jewish community. We want to say this loud and clear: We are committed to continuing dialogue with our interfaith partners and to combating antisemitism and all forms of violence, discrimination and human rights violations. To increase awareness of violence against people of other faiths in the United States, the 225th General Assembly has approved a Study Document Denouncing Antisemitism and Islamophobia. At the same time, we are convinced that there is a fundamental difference between antisemitism and the right to critique the policies of Israel deemed illegal under international law.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a huge responsibility as a denomination in a country that provides military aid to Israel, other countries in the Middle East and around the world. Speaking truth to power is inherent in the theological underpinnings of a prophetic voice.

We know this decision will be welcomed by many and attacked by others. We will continue promoting dialogue with those who have different convictions and encourage anyone who would like to engage the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in dialogue to be in contact with us.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. Herbert Nelson, II".

Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)