

Mennonite Central Committee Discussion Paper on Palestine-Israel

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has worked alongside Palestinians for nearly six decades and with Israelis for nearly forty years. After the horrors of the Holocaust, many Jews welcomed the creation of the State of Israel, viewing it as a potential safe haven. The establishment of Israel in 1948, however, went hand in hand with the massive dispossession and displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians. MCC responded in 1949 to this newly created refugee crisis with material assistance and in numerous other ways. Over the ensuing years MCC developed bonds of friendship and partnership with the Palestinian churches, joining them in their ministry. Finally, since Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, MCC has supported the dedicated work of both Palestinians and Israelis committed to non-violence and to a future of peace, justice, and reconciliation for both peoples.

Given MCC's long history with Palestinians and Israelis, MCC is often asked about its position regarding a future resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Does MCC support the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel? Does MCC support the eventual emergence of one state in which Palestinians and Israelis would live together in equality? This statement outlines positions and principles that MCC believes must be considered in any future resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and which guide MCC's advocacy efforts.

First, any resolution of the conflict should be judged according to a biblical theology of land and relationships. MCC believes that ultimately land and other natural resources belong to God. "The land is mine," says the Lord. "With me you are but aliens and tenants." (Lev. 25:23). Biblical promises of land to Abraham and his descendants and narratives of the conquest of the land must be understood in light of: God's admonition to the people to treat "alien" others justly, remembering that they had been aliens (e.g. Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:34); the prophetic injunctions to practice justice and righteousness in the land (e.g. Deut. 16:20; Micah 6:8; Zeph. 2:3); and God's normative self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

God's creative Spirit works within history towards a day in which humanity will sit securely under vine and fig tree without fear (Micah 4:4). In his inaugural sermon in Nazareth, Jesus proclaimed the "year of the Lord's favor," the Jubilee year described by the priestly writers of Leviticus in which those dispossessed from the land once more enjoy security in the land (Luke 4:18-19; Lev. 25). In Jesus Christ, dividing walls of hostility are broken down, and enemies are reconciled in one body (Eph. 2:10-20). Christians, therefore, should be concerned about the restoration of the dispossessed, security in the land for all, and conditions which foster and sustain reconciliation.

Second, MCC laments that the current reality in the Holy Land falls far short of this biblical vision, with neither Palestinian nor Israeli enjoying secure dwellings. Too often Israelis and Palestinians turn to violence in attempts to achieve security and freedom. Israel builds walls and fences on confiscated land and in the process seizes more land and control of water resources, constructs illegal settlements on that land, and confines

Palestinians to increasingly smaller parcels of territory with severely restricted movement and bleak economic prospects. These walls and fences might be presented as a security measure, but they create more dispossession and over time increase the insecurity of both peoples. Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons, meanwhile, be they in Israel or in refugee camps in the Occupied Territories, Jordan, Syria, or Lebanon, are forgotten in their exile.

Just as Palestinians face insecurity, so do Israeli Jews. A minority of Palestinians rejects ongoing Jewish communal life in the land and sometimes resorts to violent attacks on Israeli military forces and civilians. Israelis, like Palestinians, have known the suffering and loss of death and injury.

The current reality in the land for Palestinians and Israelis is thus one of dispossession, insecurity, and enmity, rather than landed security and reconciliation. As an organization committed to Christ's way of peace, MCC deplores all forms of violence, especially attacks against civilians. MCC mourns with all who have lost loved ones in this conflict, and awaits the day when both peoples will live in security in the land.

Third, MCC believes that all are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). In the new kingdom inaugurated by God in Jesus Christ, no people are elevated above others or granted privileges at the expense of others (e.g. Gal. 3:28). Therefore, MCC rejects any ideology or political program which seeks the expulsion or subordination of either Palestinians or Israelis.

Fourth, as a Christian organization MCC believes that statehood is not an end in itself. States can sometimes help guarantee basic human rights. Governments, however, are not ultimate authorities, but are judged according to the extent that they deter evil conduct and approve the good (Rom. 13:1-7). Nationalist ideologies which make exclusive connections between particular nations and particular states threaten the rights of those outside the nation, leading to various forms of discrimination and even violence. Statehood is thus not synonymous with justice, nor does it guarantee security and safety for all people. Palestinians have longed for a state in which they might enjoy freedom and security. A Palestinian state in the discontinuous parcels of land demarcated by Israel's separation wall, however, will not bring either durable justice or security to Palestinians or Israelis.

Fifth, MCC does not take a final position on the question of whether the best solution to the conflict is two states side-by-side, with the Palestinian state based on the 1949 Armistice Line comprising all of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, or one state in which Palestinians and Israelis enjoy equal citizenship. MCC works with both Palestinians and Israelis who are committed to nonviolence – whether they believe that peace, justice, and reconciliation are best secured in the context of a two-state solution, or that this will be best achieved in the framework of one, bi-national state of equal citizenship. MCC is open to participating in coalitions which advocate either for a two-state solution or a one-state solution to the conflict, as long as the proposed solution to the conflict embraces the following principles:

* A commitment to respect human rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international covenants and conventions.

*An end to the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem as called for by United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338;

*A shared Jerusalem in which the spiritual significance of the city for Christians, Muslims and Jews would be recognized. Jews, Christians, and Muslims should all be able to worship and practice their faiths freely and securely in the land;

*An end to discriminatory confiscation and distribution of land and water resources, including those practices prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention, and, in accordance with the ruling from the International Court of Justice, the dismantling of the illegal separation wall;

*Justice and security for Palestinian refugees, as called for by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.

Any durable resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, MCC believes, must build upon these principles.

July 2007