

1                    *A Call for the United Church of Christ to Advocate for the*  
2                    *Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation*

3                    *Thirty-First General Synod*  
4                    United Church of Christ  
5                    June, 2017

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7                    Submitted by . . . . on . . . .

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10           **Summary**

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12           This Resolution calls attention to the plight of children suffering under Israel’s prolonged  
13           military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. In particular, this resolution  
14           names the traumatic situation of children living with constant fear of arrest, detention, and  
15           violence at the hands of Israeli forces. It calls the United Church of Christ to advocate for the  
16           human rights of the children of Palestine. It requests the General Minister and President of the  
17           United Church of Christ to petition the Prime Minister of Israel and the Israeli Ambassador,  
18           asking them to guarantee basic due process rights and exercise an absolute prohibition against  
19           torture and ill-treatment of children detained by Israeli authorities. This resolution insists that,  
20           from the moment of arrest, all operations and procedures imposed on Palestinian children be  
21           carried out in accordance with international juvenile justice standards, specifically the United  
22           Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Israel ratified in 1991. Further, this  
23           resolution calls on the United States government to adhere to U.S. laws concerning human rights  
24           violations and the disbursement of military aid and assistance to Israeli armed forces.  
25           Recognizing that establishing a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis is essential for  
26           creating and sustaining the conditions under which life can flourish for both Palestinian and  
27           Israeli children, this Resolution also urges all settings of the United Church of Christ to persist in  
28           efforts to end the Israeli military occupation of Palestinians living in the West Bank, East  
29           Jerusalem, and Gaza as called for in particular by the Thirtieth General Synod.

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31           **Biblical, Historical, and Theological Grounding**

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33           *Kairos Palestine*, written by Palestinian Christian theologians in 2009 and commended to the  
34           churches by the Thirtieth General Synod, reminds us that “the communion of love says to every  
35           believer in spirit and in truth: if my brother is a prisoner I am a prisoner; if his home is destroyed,  
36           my home is destroyed; when my brother is killed, then I too am killed.”[1] Discipleship requires  
37           solidarity with the vulnerable and the oppressed.

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39           As Palestinians living in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip enter their 50th year  
40           under Israeli military occupation, instability and violence continue to define much of life for

41 Palestinian children. While living under prolonged military occupation causes suffering to all  
42 Palestinians, the plight of children is of particular concern in light of the persistent grave human  
43 rights violations and violence that surround them and the physical and emotional trauma to  
44 which they are subject. Generations of children have come of age as refugees living in refugee  
45 camps and behind walls.[2] Generations of children have waited at checkpoints to go to school  
46 and return home.[3] Generations of children have witnessed young Israeli soldiers harass and  
47 humiliate their parents. Generations of children have witnessed the demolition of their families’  
48 homes or businesses, theft of their land, or the destruction of their families’ farms and  
49 orchards.[4] Generations of children have been arrested by Israeli forces and prosecuted in an  
50 Israeli military detention system notorious for the systematic and widespread ill-treatment of  
51 children.[5]

52  
53 Israel has the dubious distinction of being the only country in the world that systematically  
54 prosecutes children in military courts. Since the year 2000, over 8,000 Palestinian children have  
55 been arrested and prosecuted in this system.[6] Ill-treatment in the Israeli military detention  
56 system remains “widespread, systematic, and institutionalized throughout the process,”  
57 according to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) March 2013 report *Children in*  
58 *Israeli Military Detention - Observations and Recommendations March*. [7] Subsequent update  
59 reports from UNICEF published in October 2013 and February 2015 have found that the  
60 situation has changed little for Palestinian children arrested by Israeli forces in the occupied  
61 West Bank.[8][9]

62  
63 In April 2016, Defense for Children International – Palestine (DCIP) published a study of 429  
64 West Bank children detained between 2012 and 2015. Three out of four children had endured  
65 some form of physical violence after being detained by Israeli forces. In 97 percent of the cases,  
66 children had no parent or lawyer present during the interrogation process. Interrogators used  
67 position abuse, threats, or isolation to coerce confessions from some of these children. At least  
68 66 children were held in solitary confinement for an average period of 13 days. One child was  
69 held in isolation for 45 days.[10]

70  
71 By signing the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, the State of Israel obligated itself to  
72 implement international juvenile justice standards. These standards require that children be  
73 deprived of their liberty *only as a measure of last resort*. The standards include universal  
74 prohibitions against physical violence and torture. Yet, Palestinian children arrested by Israeli  
75 forces and prosecuted under Israeli military law *routinely experience human rights violations*  
76 prohibited by international law.

77  
78 Since 1967, Israel has operated *two separate legal systems* in the same territory. Israeli Jewish  
79 settlers who (in violation of international law) reside in the West Bank enjoy protections  
80 provided by the Israeli civilian legal system. In contrast, Palestinians in the West Bank are

81 subject to Israeli military law, which fails to ensure and, in fact, denies basic and fundamental  
82 rights. Palestinian children in the West Bank thus suffer abuses and constraints of a military  
83 detention system which no Israeli child living in the West Bank ever experiences.

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85 The occupation thus creates a system where Palestinians living in the same occupied territory as  
86 Israeli settlers have inferior rights and protections under the law – a system where Palestinian  
87 children experience an environment of fear, dehumanization and violence that is contradictory to  
88 the flourishing of life to which all children, including Palestinian and Israeli children, aspire.

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90 The witness of Scripture grants children a privileged place in the embrace of Jesus and the vision  
91 of the beloved community. Jesus welcomed children and blessed them; he called us to become  
92 childlike in our reception of the Realm of God.[11] Jesus himself was born in Palestine under  
93 Roman Occupation and, according to Matthew’s Gospel, escaped the slaughter of innocents by  
94 becoming a refugee in Egypt before returning to the land of his birth where he came of age.[12]  
95 To read the Gospels is to become aware of both the blessing and the vulnerability of children.  
96 It is to know that God’s love was revealed in a child and, in particular, a child vulnerable to  
97 injustice and violence.

98

99 Justice and peace are impeded today by those who hide behind a false equivalency, refusing to  
100 acknowledge the gross imbalance of military and police power between Israelis and Palestinians,  
101 or refusing to recognize that the impact of occupation falls with greater weight on the occupied,  
102 not the occupier. Justice and peace are impeded today by those who, in the face of failed peace  
103 processes and seemingly intractable obstacles, grow resigned and indifferent, as if God were  
104 impotent and historical change impossible. To those lacking vision or energy to pursue this issue  
105 of justice, Palestinian Christians respond, “In the absence of hope, we cry out our cry of hope.  
106 We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God’s goodness will finally triumph over the  
107 evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land.”[13]

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### 109 **The Motion**

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111 *WHEREAS* the General Synod of the United Church of Christ has repeatedly called for a just  
112 settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, for an end to prolonged Israeli military occupation  
113 of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, for the upholding of principles of non-violence, and  
114 for the protection of human rights; and

115

116 *WHEREAS* the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the State of Israel  
117 has ratified, calls on states to “Treat every child deprived of liberty with humanity and respect  
118 for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs  
119 of persons of his or her age,” to use arrest and imprisonment of children “only as a measure of  
120 last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time,” to give detained children “prompt

121 access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of  
122 the deprivation of his or her liberty” and “the right to maintain contact with his or her family  
123 through correspondence and visits,” and in no case to subject children to “torture or other cruel,  
124 inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,”[14]; and

125  
126 *WHEREAS* UNICEF in 2013 determined that the “Ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the  
127 Israeli military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized” and  
128 that this ill-treatment of children includes the use of blindfolds, hand-ties, strip searches, physical  
129 violence, verbal abuse and intimidation, denial of access to lawyers and parents prior to and  
130 during interrogation, and failure to inform children of their legal rights, such as their right to  
131 remain silent[7]; and

132  
133 *WHEREAS* subsequent update reports to UNICEF’s 2013 report have found that the situation has  
134 changed little for Palestinian children arrested by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank[8][9];  
135 and

136  
137 *WHEREAS* the United States Department of State in its annual country reports on human rights  
138 practices has, since 2007 in each annual country report on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian  
139 Territory, included data and information on ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian children in  
140 Israeli military detention, denial of fair trial rights in Israeli military courts, and other grave  
141 violations against children committed by Israeli forces and settlers; and

142  
143 *WHEREAS* Defense for Children International–Palestine (DCIP) and other international,  
144 Palestinian, and Israeli human rights organizations regularly publish reports confirming Israel’s  
145 widespread and systematic ill-treatment of Palestinian children arrested in the occupied West  
146 Bank, ill-treatment which includes heavily armed Israeli soldiers invading children’s homes and  
147 arresting them in the middle of the night; failure to notify parents of the reason for arrest or the  
148 location of detention; denial of access to lawyers during interrogation; failure to inform children  
149 of their rights; the use of position abuse, threats, and isolation by interrogators to coerce  
150 confessions; the use of solitary confinement for interrogation purposes; acceptance of  
151 confessions obtained by coercion or torture as legal courtroom evidence, even those confessions  
152 written in Hebrew and not understood by children coerced into signing them; and the routine  
153 transfer of Palestinian children out of the occupied Palestinian territories to prisons inside Israel  
154 in violation of international law[15]; and

155  
156 *WHEREAS* Israeli forces have held an average of 201 Palestinian children in custody each month  
157 since 2011, and this number spiked dramatically in late 2015 so that by the end of February 2016  
158 the total had increased to 440, the highest number at any given point since the Israel Prison  
159 Service began releasing data in 2008[16]; and

160

161 *WHEREAS* the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act specifies that no military assistance be given to any  
162 country that “engages in a consistent pattern of gross violation of internationally recognized  
163 human rights” and on at least eleven previous occasions the U.S. has withheld assistance from  
164 countries based on their human rights violations[17];  
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166 *THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED* that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of  
167 Christ:  
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169 *CALLS ON* the State of Israel to guarantee basic due process rights and exercise an absolute  
170 prohibition against torture and ill-treatment of detained children, ensuring that, from the moment  
171 of arrest, all operations and procedures are carried out in accordance with international juvenile  
172 justice standards, specifically the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and  
173 *REQUESTS* the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ to communicate  
174 this call to the Prime Minister of Israel and the Israeli Ambassador to the United States, noting  
175 that among the practices in Israel’s military detention system that require change are the use of  
176 nighttime arrests in the child’s home, physical and verbal abuse, blindfolds and restraints, strip  
177 searches, solitary confinement, coerced confessions and confessions written in Hebrew, as well  
178 as the separation of detained children from their parents and legal counselors (including the  
179 transfer of Palestinian children to prisons within the State of Israel that their parents are not  
180 permitted to visit);  
181

182 *CALLS ON* the government of the United States to adhere to its own established law – in this  
183 case, the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act – by withholding military assistance from the State of  
184 Israel due to its practices of arrest and detention of Palestinian children, requiring Israel to  
185 guarantee basic due process rights and exercise an absolute prohibition against torture and ill-  
186 treatment of detained children, ensuring that, from the moment of arrest, all operations and  
187 procedures are carried out in accordance with international juvenile justice standards, specifically  
188 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and *REQUESTS* the General Minister  
189 and President of the United Church of Christ to communicate this call to the United States  
190 Senate, as well as the President, the Vice President, and the Secretary of State of the United  
191 States;  
192

193 *CALLS ON* the United States Senate to join with 194 other nations in ratifying the United  
194 Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child so as to bring stronger international pressure to  
195 bear on Israel to comply with the Convention’s provisions, in particular Articles 37 and 40 of the  
196 Convention governing the treatment of children held in detention and *REQUESTS* the General  
197 Minister and President of the United Church of Christ to communicate this call to the United  
198 States Senate, as well as the President, Vice President, and Secretary of State of the United  
199 States;  
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201 *EXPRESSES* gratitude to Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and the Christian  
202 Church (Disciples of Christ) for its advocacy on behalf of children in Palestine and the State of  
203 Israel;  
204  
205 *ENCOURAGES* continued partnership with U.S. and global ecumenical and interfaith partners,  
206 as well as with Palestinian and Israeli organizations that are advocating for the rights of children  
207 and providing educational, social, and psychological support for children and their families  
208 adversely affected by the occupation; and  
209  
210 *CALLS ON* all settings of the United Church of Christ to learn about the plight of children in  
211 Palestine and the State of Israel, as well as to support implementation of the resolution from  
212 Thirtieth General Synod entitled “A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions  
213 Toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” using as an implementation guide the  
214 document “Promoting a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel: A Guide for United Church of Christ Faith  
215 Leaders,” produced by the United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network.[18]  
216  
217 *The funding for the implementation of this Resolution will be made in accordance with the*  
218 *overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.*  
219  
220 *The Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the*  
221 *United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.*

- [1] *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth, A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from Palestinian Suffering*, 2009, par. 5.2, [Kairos Palestine - A Moment of Truth](#)
- [2] United Nations Relief and Works Agency, multiple reports, [U.N. Relief and Works Agency](#)
- [3] U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – Occupied Palestinian Territories web site contains useful, detailed reports about Israeli checkpoints, [United Nations OCHA-OPT website](#)
- [4] Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, multiple reports, [ICAHD](#)
- [5] World Council of Churches, edited by John Calhoun and Rajan Solomon, *Palestinian Prisoners: A Question of Conscience*, 2014
- [6] [Defense for Children International - Palestine, report citing numbers of detained children](#)
- [7] UNICEF, *Children in Israeli Military Detention – Observations and Recommendations – 6 March 2013*, [Children in Israeli Military Detention - Observations and Recommendations - 6 March 2013](#)
- [8] UNICEF, *Children in Military Detention – Bulletin No. 1 – October 2013*, [UNICEF oPt Children in Military Detention - Bulletin No. 1 - October 2013](#)

- [9] UNICEF, *Children in Israeli Military Detention – Observations and Recommendations – Bulletin No. 2 – February 2015*, [UNICEF oPt Children in Israeli Military Detention - Observations and Recommendations - Bulletin No. 2 - February 2015](#)
- [10] Defense for Children International – Palestine, *No Way to Treat a Child, Palestinian Children in the Israeli Military Detention System*, 14 April 2016, [Palestine Children in the Israeli Military Detention System](#)
- [11] Matthew 18:1-5; Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-15
- [12] Matthew 2:1-23
- [13] *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth, A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from Palestinian Suffering*, 2009, par. 10, [Kairos Palestine - A Moment of Truth](#)
- [14] United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 37, [U.N. Convention of the Rights of the Child](#)
- [15] Defense for Children International – Palestine, *No Way to Treat a Child, Palestinian Children in the Israeli Military Detention System*, 14 April 2016, [Palestinian Children in the Israeli Military Detention System](#)
- [16] Defense of Children International - Palestine, *Detention Bulletin – April 2016*, publ. August 8, 2016, [Detention Bulletin - April 2016](#)
- [17] U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, *U.S. Military Aid to Israel: Policy Implications and Options*, March 2012, [U.S. Military Aid to Israel: Policy Implications and Options](#)
- [18] United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network, *Promoting a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel: A Guide for United Church of Christ Faith Leaders*, [Promoting a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel](#)

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### **International Law**

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