

A CALL TO THE CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA

from the
Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network (PIEN)



On 2nd August 2024, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Justin Welby, issued a strong [statement](#) regarding the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

In it, he said, in part:

... it is clear to me that the regime imposed by successive Israeli governments in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is one of systematic discrimination. Through many strategies, the state of Israel has been denying the Palestinian people dignity, freedom and hope. ...it is clear that ending the occupation is a legal and moral necessity.

The Archbishop issued the statement following the [International Court of Justice's Advisory Ruling](#) (19th July) that Israel's occupation of and settlements within the Palestinian Territories are illegal under international law. As such, all nations and organisations have a legal responsibility to refrain from all dealings with Israel that could support Israel's unlawful presence in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and to hold Israel accountable to international law.

Churches have an undeniable responsibility to do so.

Christian leaders in Jerusalem have repeatedly called for the global church to condemn the occupation of Palestinian territories and to call for all parties to support a ceasefire. The [Open Letter](#) from Palestinian Christians on 20 October 2023 stated:

"We come alongside fellow Christians in condemning all attacks on civilians, especially defenseless families and children. Yet, we are disturbed by the silence of many church leaders and theologians when it is Palestinian civilians who are killed. We are also horrified by the refusal of some western Christians to condemn the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine, and, in some instances, their justification of and support for the occupation..."

Palestinian Theologian Rev. Dr Munther Isaac from Bethlehem has commented that the bible is being weaponised to support a genocide, and many Christians do not see the humanity of Palestinians because of Christian Zionist theology. Listen to his profound and insightful talk [Silence is Complicity](#), when he spoke to a US church on the 14th August 2024.

This cry of Palestinian Christians to the global church has been echoing for years with many Christians heeding their cry.

Many churches, especially in the United States of America, have already taken significant action:

- In 2015, the [United Churches of Christ](#) (USA) voted to divest from companies profiting from Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- In 2016, the [Alliance of Baptists](#) (USA) affirmed "the use of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) strategies and comprehensive education and advocacy programs to end the military occupation of Palestinian land".
- The [World Communion of Reformed Churches](#) in 2017 called its members to "examine their mission, education and investment relationships with Israel and Palestine in the light of ... commitments to human rights and the protection of international law".

- In 2018 the Quakers (UK) voted not to invest funds in companies profiting from the Israeli occupation of Palestine.
- In 2018, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the USA voted to divest from companies involved in Israel's violation of Palestinian human rights.
- In 2022 Presbyterian Church (USA) decisively declared that Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people constitutes apartheid and called all its members "to seek appropriate ways to bring an end to Israel's apartheid" and in 2024, they voted to divest from Israel Bonds and to reject Christian Zionism.
- In 2022, the World Council of Churches Assembly affirmed that "the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories since 1967, as well as settlement construction and expansion in the occupied territories, is illegal under international law and must be ended."
- In 2024, the United Methodist Church (USA) voted to divest from Israel bonds.

A number of statements have likewise been issued, especially since 7th October 2023. See this [compiled list](#) of ecumenical and church statements from around the world.

It is beyond time for Churches in Australia to take meaningful and appropriate action.

Therefore, we call on Australian Churches:

- to issue a public statement calling for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, an easing of tensions in the Middle East, and the observance of international law;
- to urge the Australian Government to take meaningful action to sanction the State of Israel in the light of the International Court of Justice's judgement;
- to divest from any companies that are assisting or profiting from Israel's occupation of Palestinian land;
- to provide educational and worship resources for local congregations to be informed and to pray for peace in the Holy Land. Useful resources are provided by the World Council of Churches each year to mark the [World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel](#).

PIEN is more than happy to enter into further dialogue with you around the above-mentioned actions and the current catastrophic situation facing Gazans in particular. Your Palestinian Christian siblings in Christ are crying out, please don't turn away.

We would be grateful if you could please share any statements or resolutions, you or your church decides to make.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of PIEN

Revd Dr Ray Williamson OAM (PIEN Vice President)

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Australian Christians who seek lasting peace for the people of Palestine and Israel.

We aim to equip and inform Australian churches, inspired by Christ's vision for universal reconciliation.

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