

The Fifth International Conference of the Sabeel Ecumenical Palestinian Liberation Theology Center, meeting in Jerusalem during 14-18 April, 2004, registers in strongest possible terms its opposition to the Israeli government's imposition of a unilateral strategy on the Palestinian Territories.

The theme of the Conference, "Challenging Christian Zionism," discussed this modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace in the Holy Land. This movement, with its elevation of modern political Zionism, provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism, and militarism.

The unilateral actions of the Israeli government contradict International Law, undermine previous peace agreements, deny Palestinian participation, and jeopardize a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Moreover, we wish to express our outrage over the endorsement of the Sharon *dictat* by the United States and other governments, which repeats the historical errors of colonial empires in the past, such as Britain's Balfour Declaration of 2 November, 1917. Such unilateral decrees perpetuate the ongoing dispossession of Palestinians of their national and human rights and property.

The Sabeel Conference assembled local and international theologians, bishops and clergy, political scientists, and legal experts to analyze the role of Christian Zionism in advancing hard-line Israeli and U.S. policies in the region.

Over 600 participants from over 30 countries participated in the Conference and committed themselves to return to their countries to pursue a political solution to the conflict in the Holy Land that is based on the enforcement of International Law and existing United Nations resolutions. Palestinian participants from the West Bank were unable to attend the Conference due to Israeli military closures.

The attached statement was issued by the Conference to assert the will of the participants in rejecting the theology of Christian Zionism and the unilateral policies now being advanced by the Bush and Sharon governments. Unless we return to international legitimacy the Conference participants fear that an even more dangerous phase of the occupation lies ahead.

Statement on Challenging Christian Zionism

**The 5TH International Sabeel Conference Statement
"Challenging Christian Zionism"**

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."
(Matthew 5:9)

Christian Zionism is a modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace within Palestine and Israel. The Christian Zionist programme provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism, and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today. We also repudiate the more insidious form of Christian Zionism pervasive in the mainline churches that remains silent in the face of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Therefore, we categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as a false teaching that undermines the biblical message of love, mercy, and justice.

We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organizations with extremist elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently seeking to impose their unilateral preemptive strategies and militaristic rule over others, including Palestine and Iraq. As a result of the 14 April, 2004 Bush-Sharon memorandum of understanding, the crisis in Israel and Palestine has moved into a new phase of oppression of the Palestinian people. This will inevitably lead to unending cycles of violence and counter violence that are already spreading throughout the Middle East and other parts of the world. We reject the heretical teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these extremist policies as they advance a form of racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ.

Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from ideologies of militarism and occupation and instead to pursue the healing of the world. We call upon Christians in churches on every continent to prayerfully remember the suffering of the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are victims of policies of occupation and militarism. These policies are reviving a system of apartheid that is turning Palestinian cities, towns and villages into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusively Jewish colonies. The recent construction of the Israeli wall on Palestinian land precludes a viable Palestinian state.

Therefore, we commit ourselves to the following principles as an alternative way (Sabeel):

- We affirm that all people are created in the image of God and called to honor the dignity and respect the equal rights of every human being.
- We call upon people of good will everywhere to reject the theology of Christian Zionism and all parallel religious and ideological fundamentalisms that privilege particular people at the expense of others.
- We are committed to the power of non-violent resistance to defeat the occupation and attain a just and lasting peace.
- With renewed urgency we warn that the theology of Christian Zionism is leading to the moral justification of empire, colonization, apartheid, and oppression.

Moreover, we affirm that a just and lasting peace in Palestine and Israel must be based on the Jerusalem Sabeel Document: Principles for a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel (2004).¹

Sabeel's vision embraces two sovereign states, Palestine and Israel, which will enter into confederation or even a federation, possibly with other neighboring countries, where Jerusalem becomes the federal capital. Indeed, the ideal and best solution has always been to envisage ultimately a bi-national state in Palestine-Israel where people are free and equal, living under a constitutional democracy that protects and guarantees all their rights, responsibilities, and duties without racism or discrimination - one state for two nations and three religions.

This is where Sabeel takes its stand. We will stand for justice. We can do no other. Justice alone guarantees a peace that will lead to reconciliation and a life of security and prosperity for all the peoples of our land. By standing on the side of justice, we open ourselves to the work of peace -- and working for peace makes us children of God.

God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security, or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently but non-violently.

"What does the Lord require of you, to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

¹ See www.sabeel.org