

**CHURCH LEADERS IN JERUSALEM URGE WORLD CHURCHES AND ALL
CHRISTIANS TO ADVOCATE FOR PEACE**

*“They have treated the wounds of my people lightly saying Peace, Peace when there is
no Peace.” Jeremiah 6:14*

“If one member suffers all members suffer with it.” I Corinthians 12: 26

Make plain the vision... Habakkuk 2:2

Churches and Christian brothers and sisters around the world:

Grace and Peace to you from Jerusalem,

The World Council of Churches together with Churches and international agencies have joined together for a special Christian advocacy initiative called **International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, March 12 – 19, 2006**. This initiative comes from those who are part of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) together with Pax Christi International. The EAPPI began three years ago as a response to a call from the Churches in Jerusalem. Today one year away from the 40th anniversary of the illegal Israeli Occupation of Palestine we renew our call and urge you to actively participate in the worldwide week of Christian advocacy for a just peace.

During the last 39 years Churches, Church Leaders and ordinary Christians have worked tirelessly and patiently advocating for Peace in Palestine and Israel. Now as the situation continues to deteriorate and opportunities for peace are forsaken it is crucial for Christians to make their voices heard vigorously in the public arena. Together with the strong and deeply treasured actions of prayer and Christian solidarity, the churches in Jerusalem and the Holy Land need you to speak with the moral authority of the church from the ethical perspective of the Christian faith. Lawmakers and politicians in your country need to know that the Churches are well aware of the on-going suffering caused by the Occupation and the subsequent insecurity and are becoming even more actively involved in seeking a just peace. All national governments have a responsibility to uphold international law and Christians have a role in holding our governments to account.

We ask all Christians to consider the prophetic role of the Church and the power and importance of public witness so that the sufferings, injustices and insecurity of the Occupation which affects Israelis and Palestinians—be they Christians, Muslims or Jews—become an urgent priority for all national governments.

The positive attention given to the unilateral pullout from the Gaza Strip has served to draw world attention away from the realities on the West Bank and East Jerusalem. There is a steady expansion of Israeli military control, settler blocks continue to grow and land is illegally seized to build a wall which has been condemned internationally. West Bank cities are being choked to death economically and the people live in constant fear of military incursions. The security situation within the Palestinian Territories is in crisis and the Palestinian Authority must be supported in its efforts to impose the rule of law and at the same time be held accountable in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The price of Occupation is unbearably high for those living in Israeli as well. The country is dominated by insecurity, fear and poverty at the same time social inequalities spiral out of control.

Palestinian Christians face the same struggles and suffer the same desperate situation as all other Palestinians but we also face an alarming rate of migration out of Palestine. The Christian presence in Palestine is important for the whole society and we are concerned for the future of our community and for the institutions that serve all Palestinians.

The same solution is required to end the suffering both in Israel and Palestine: A just peace reached through negotiations guided by international law. An end to the illegal Occupation is the first step towards real peace and security for both Israel and Palestine. Peace, justice and security for Palestine will bring peace, justice and security for Israel.

We continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and to insist that a shared and open Jerusalem, which respects the rights and sovereignty of the three religions and two peoples, is essential to a just peace in the Middle East.

The Christian perspective on law and justice leads us to call for a two-state solution based on international law which provides a truly viable, contiguous, independent, sovereign state.

We affirm a vision of peace with justice based on reconciliation. We as Christians have faith in God's power and presence. Our faith is a well spring of hope and perseverance. It is that very hope that leads us to assert that the present situation can and must be changed. We call for assertive non-violent efforts to bring peace and we condemn in the strongest possible terms all those that use violence and acts of terror.

However, the situation is urgent. With every passing month the possibility of a peaceful negotiated solution grows more distant. The more settlements that are built and the more the Wall sets the borders on confiscated lands means that the West Bank communities are separated further from each other. Similarly, Muslims and Christians have further restrictions placed on their access to the Holy sites, especially in Jerusalem, people cannot travel and families are separated. Palestinian children are illegally detained and more Palestinian Christians leave the Holy Land because of lack of work, security and hope for the future. In consequence a viable, contiguous Palestinian State becomes less likely. Every day is pushing a short term solution further away.

We hope and pray that Christians throughout the world will join together in the week of **March 12 to 19** to make a public witness for peace. It is our prayer that you will speak boldly to your lawmakers to lift up the suffering of the people and to ask them to undertake specific actions for peace.

In Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah Christians will be gathering in joint services on **March 12** to launch the International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel and lift up the Christian voice for a just peace. Join us in your own country and speak to your own government.

It is your solidarity that together with God's grace helps us to be advocates of Peace and ministers of reconciliation in this war-torn place. God has given us the vision of peace with justice: Join with us to "make plain the vision".

+Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem

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