

1 The Business Committee of the Thirty-first General Synod has recommended this proposed
2 resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

3
4 **A Call for the United Church of Christ to Advocate for the**
5 **Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation**

6 **A Resolution of Witness**
7

8 **Submitted by First Congregational Church of Old Lyme, Connecticut, with the**
9 **concurrence of New Hope Baptist United Church of Christ, Washington, DC; Plymouth**
10 **Congregational United Church of Christ, Washington, DC; First Congregational Church**
11 **of Antioch, Pittsburg, CA; Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ,**
12 **Bethesda, MD; Pilgrim Congregational Church United Church of Christ, Redding, CA;**
13 **Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, Fort Wayne, IN; First Congregational**
14 **United Church of Christ, Hillsboro, OR; First Congregational United Church of Christ,**
15 **Portland, OR; Olmsted Community Church, Olmsted Falls, OH; Peace United Church of**
16 **Christ, Santa Cruz, CA; First Congregational Church, Ripon, CA; Shalom United Church**
17 **of Christ, New Haven, CT; First Congregational Church, Guilford, CT, Clackamas United**
18 **Church of Christ, Milwaukie, OR**

19 **Summary**
20

21 This Resolution calls attention to the plight of children suffering under Israel's prolonged
22 military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. In particular, this resolution
23 names the traumatic situation of children living with constant fear of arrest, detention, and
24 violence at the hands of Israeli forces. It calls the United Church of Christ to advocate for the
25 human rights of the children of Palestine. It requests the General Minister and President of the
26 United Church of Christ to petition the Prime Minister of Israel and the Israeli Ambassador,
27 asking them to guarantee basic due process rights and exercise an absolute prohibition against
28 torture and ill-treatment of children detained by Israeli authorities. This resolution insists that,
29 from the moment of arrest, all operations and procedures imposed on Palestinian children be
30 carried out in accordance with international juvenile justice standards, specifically the United
31 Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Israel ratified in 1991. Further, this
32 resolution calls on the United States government to adhere to U.S. laws concerning human rights
33 violations and the disbursement of military aid and assistance to Israeli armed forces.
34 Recognizing that establishing a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis is essential for
35 creating and sustaining the conditions under which life can flourish for both Palestinian and
36 Israeli children, this Resolution also urges all settings of the United Church of Christ to persist in
37 efforts to end the Israeli military occupation of Palestinians living in the West Bank, East
38 Jerusalem, and Gaza as called for in particular by the Thirtieth General Synod.
39

40 **Biblical, Historical, and Theological Grounding**

41
42 *Kairos Palestine*, written by Palestinian Christian theologians in 2009 and commended to the
43 churches by the Thirtieth General Synod, reminds us that “the communion of love says to every
44 believer in spirit and in truth: if my brother is a prisoner I am a prisoner; if his home is destroyed,
45 my home is destroyed; when my brother is killed, then I too am killed.”[1] Discipleship requires
46 solidarity with the vulnerable and the oppressed.

47
48 As Palestinians living in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip enter their 50th year
49 under Israeli military occupation, instability and violence continue to define much of life for
50 Palestinian children. While living under prolonged military occupation causes suffering to all
51 Palestinians, the plight of children is of particular concern in light of the persistent grave human
52 rights violations and violence that surround them and the physical and emotional trauma to
53 which they are subject. Generations of children have come of age as refugees living in refugee
54 camps and behind walls.[2] Generations of children have waited at checkpoints to go to school
55 and return home.[3] Generations of children have witnessed young Israeli soldiers harass and
56 humiliate their parents. Generations of children have witnessed the demolition of their families’
57 homes or businesses, theft of their land, or the destruction of their families’ farms and
58 orchards.[4] Generations of children have been arrested by Israeli forces and prosecuted in an
59 Israeli military detention system notorious for the systematic and widespread ill-treatment of
60 children.[5]

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

71
72 In April 2016, Defense for Children International – Palestine (DCIP) published a study of 429
73 West Bank children detained between 2012 and 2015. Three out of four children had endured
74 some form of physical violence after being detained by Israeli forces. In 97 percent of the cases,
75 children had no parent or lawyer present during the interrogation process. Interrogators used
76 position abuse, threats, or isolation to coerce confessions from some of these children. At least
77 66 children were held in solitary confinement for an average period of 13 days. One child was
78 held in isolation for 45 days.[10]

79

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

86
87 Since 1967, Israel has operated *two separate legal systems* in the same territory. Israeli Jewish
88 settlers who (in violation of international law) reside in the West Bank enjoy protections
89 provided by the Israeli civilian legal system. In contrast, Palestinians in the West Bank are
90 subject to Israeli military law, which fails to ensure and, in fact, denies basic and fundamental
91 rights. Palestinian children in the West Bank thus suffer abuses and constraints of a military
92 detention system which no Israeli child living in the West Bank ever experiences.

93
94 The occupation thus creates a system where Palestinians living in the same occupied territory as
95 Israeli settlers have inferior rights and protections under the law – a system where Palestinian
96 children experience an environment of fear, dehumanization and violence that is contradictory to
97 the flourishing of life to which all children, including Palestinian and Israeli children, aspire.

98
99 The witness of Scripture grants children a privileged place in the embrace of Jesus and the vision
100 of the beloved community. Jesus welcomed children and blessed them; he called us to become
101 childlike in our reception of the Realm of God.[11] Jesus himself was born in Palestine under
102 Roman Occupation and, according to Matthew’s Gospel, escaped the slaughter of innocents by
103 becoming a refugee in Egypt before returning to the land of his birth where he came of age.[12]
104 To read the Gospels is to become aware of both the blessing and the vulnerability of children.
105 It is to know that God’s love was revealed in a child and, in particular, a child vulnerable to
106 injustice and violence.

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

117
118 **Text of the Motion**

119

120 *WHEREAS* General Synods of the United Church of Christ have repeatedly called for a just
121 settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, for an end to prolonged Israeli military occupation
122 of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, for the upholding of principles of non-violence, and
123 for the protection of human rights; and
124

125 *WHEREAS* the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the State of Israel
126 has ratified, calls on states to “Treat every child deprived of liberty with humanity and respect
127 for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs
128 of persons of his or her age,” to use arrest and imprisonment of children “only as a measure of
129 last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time,” to give detained children “prompt
130 access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of
131 the deprivation of his or her liberty” and “the right to maintain contact with his or her family
132 through correspondence and visits,” and in no case to subject children to “torture or other cruel,
133 inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,”[14]; and
134

135 *WHEREAS* UNICEF in 2013 determined that the “Ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the
136 Israeli military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized” and
137 that this ill-treatment of children includes the use of blindfolds, hand-ties, strip searches, physical
138 violence, verbal abuse and intimidation, denial of access to lawyers and parents prior to and
139 during interrogation, and failure to inform children of their legal rights, such as their right to
140 remain silent[7]; and
141

142 *WHEREAS* subsequent update reports to UNICEF’s 2013 report have found that the situation has
143 changed little for Palestinian children arrested by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank[8][9];
144 and
145

146 *WHEREAS* the United States Department of State in its annual country reports on human rights
147 practices has, since 2007 in each annual country report on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian
148 Territory, included data and information on ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian children in
149 Israeli military detention, denial of fair trial rights in Israeli military courts, and other grave
150 violations against children committed by Israeli forces and settlers; and
151

152 *WHEREAS* Defense for Children International – Palestine and other international, Palestinian,
153 and Israeli human rights organizations regularly publish reports confirming Israel’s widespread
154 and systematic ill-treatment of Palestinian children arrested in the occupied West Bank, ill-
155 treatment which includes heavily armed Israeli soldiers invading children’s homes and arresting
156 them in the middle of the night; failure to notify parents of the reason for arrest or the location of
157 detention; denial of access to lawyers during interrogation; failure to inform children of their
158 rights; the use of position abuse, threats, and isolation by interrogators to coerce confessions; the
159 use of solitary confinement for interrogation purposes; acceptance of confessions obtained by

160 coercion or torture as legal courtroom evidence, even those confessions written in Hebrew and
161 not understood by children coerced into signing them; and the routine transfer of Palestinian
162 children out of the occupied Palestinian territories to prisons inside Israel in violation of
163 international law[15]; and
164

165 *WHEREAS* Israeli forces have held an average of 201 Palestinian children in custody each month
166 since 2011, and this number spiked dramatically in late 2015 so that by the end of February 2016
167 the total had increased to 440, the highest number at any given point since the Israel Prison
168 Service began releasing data in 2008[16]; and
169

170 *WHEREAS* the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act specifies that no military assistance be given to any
171 country that “engages in a consistent pattern of gross violation of internationally recognized
172 human rights” and on at least eleven previous occasions the U.S. has withheld assistance from
173 countries based on their human rights violations[17];
174

175 *THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED* that the Thirty-First General Synod of the United Church of
176 Christ:
177

178 *CALLS ON* the State of Israel to guarantee basic due process rights and exercise an absolute
179 prohibition against torture and ill-treatment of detained children, ensuring that, from the moment
180 of arrest, all operations and procedures are carried out in accordance with international juvenile
181 justice standards, specifically the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and
182

183 *REQUESTS* the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ to communicate
184 this call to the Prime Minister of Israel and the Israeli Ambassador to the United States, noting
185 that among the practices in Israel’s military detention system that require change are the use of
186 nighttime arrests in the child’s home, physical and verbal abuse, blindfolds and restraints, strip
187 searches, solitary confinement, coerced confessions and confessions written in Hebrew, as well
188 as the separation of detained children from their parents and legal counselors (including the
189 transfer of Palestinian children to prisons within the State of Israel that their parents are not
190 permitted to visit);
191

192 *CALLS ON* the government of the United States to adhere to its own established law – in this
193 case, the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act – by withholding military assistance from the State of
194 Israel due to its practices of arrest and detention of Palestinian children, requiring Israel to
195 guarantee basic due process rights and exercise an absolute prohibition against torture and ill-
196 treatment of detained children, ensuring that, from the moment of arrest, all operations and
197 procedures are carried out in accordance with international juvenile justice standards, specifically
198 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and *REQUESTS* the General Minister
199 and President of the United Church of Christ to communicate this call to the United States

200 Senate, as well as the President, the Vice President, and the Secretary of State of the United
201 States;
202
203 *CALLS ON* the United States Senate to join with 194 other nations in ratifying the United
204 Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child so as to bring stronger international pressure to
205 bear on Israel to comply with the Convention’s provisions, in particular Articles 37 and 40 of the
206 Convention governing the treatment of children held in detention and *REQUESTS* the General
207 Minister and President of the United Church of Christ to communicate this call to the United
208 States Senate, as well as the President, Vice President, and Secretary of State of the United
209 States;
210
211 *EXPRESSES* gratitude to Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and the Christian
212 Church (Disciples of Christ) for its advocacy on behalf of children in Palestine and the State of
213 Israel;
214
215 *ENCOURAGES* continued partnership with U.S. and global ecumenical and interfaith partners,
216 as well as with Palestinian and Israeli organizations that are advocating for the rights of children
217 and providing educational, social, and psychological support for children and their families
218 adversely affected by the occupation; and
219
220 *CALLS ON* all settings of the United Church of Christ to learn about the plight of children in
221 Palestine and the State of Israel, as well as to support implementation of the resolution from
222 Thirtieth General Synod entitled “A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions
223 Toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” using as an implementation guide the
224 document “Promoting a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel: A Guide for United Church of Christ Faith
225 Leaders,” produced by the United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network.[18]
226
227 The funding for the implementation of this Resolution will be made in accordance with the
228 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.
229
230 The Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the
231 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 Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977, 1125 UNTS 3, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36b4.html>
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, G.A. Res. 44/25, U.N. Doc. A/RES/44/25 (Nov. 20, 1989), [U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child](http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/44/res44_25.html)
- UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment or Treatment, G.A. Res. 39/46, U.N. Doc. A/RES/39/46, (Dec. 10, 1984), <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/39/a39r046.htm>