



HEADS OF CHURCHES STATEMENT ON PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

It's time for the Australian Government to shift gear on Palestine and Israel. It's time for Australia to become much more active in the cause of peace in the Holy Land.

In this week of International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, we Australian church leaders call on our Government to give much higher priority to working for peace in the Holy Land.

The people of Israel and Palestine desperately need and want peace. The world desperately needs peace in the Holy Land.

Palestinians have suffered 60 years of dispossession, 41 years of military occupation, land confiscation and illegal settlements, and thousands of violent deaths.

Israelis have suffered 60 years of armed hostilities and constant threats, scores of suicide bombings and rocket attacks, and thousands of violent deaths.

Insecurity and polarisation are the chief features of life in Palestine and Israel. For Palestinians, disputes over land, roads, farms, water and military checkpoints go on and on; poverty, unemployment and restrictions on economic development hold sway. For Israelis the ever-present fear of suicide bombers and the threats from other nations in the region create daily anxiety.

After decades of conflict and tension, there is little reason for optimism or even hope. Resentment and hatred continue to grow. The cycle of violence continues.

In a major speech delivered to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute on 9 April, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Stephen Smith MP, gave an overview of Australian foreign policy. Eighteen countries received specific mention, but neither Israel nor Palestine. Yet the conflict between Israel and Palestine has for 60 years created worldwide tensions and generated hundreds of terrorist acts across the world.

We implore the Australian Government to increase its support for peacemaking between Israel and Palestine. We respectfully recommend that increased support include:

- persistent advocacy for a freely and peacefully negotiated solution acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians, whether in the form of two states or one;
- greater recognition of the plight of Palestinians after 41 years of military occupation;
- advocacy for the implementation of international law in reaching a negotiated solution;
- a quadrupling of Australia's aid contribution to the social and economic development of Palestine; and
- the facilitation of a multi-faith delegation from Australia to visit Israel and Palestine.

It's more than time for a concerted effort by the international community to work with Israel and Palestine to bring about a just peace. Australia, with its vibrant Jewish and Palestinian communities, is well placed to give a lead.

We ask all Australians to join with us in praying for justice and peace for the people of Israel and Palestine, and in urging greater commitment from the Australian Government to working for a just peace between Israel and Palestine.

Canberra, 4 June 2008

SIGNATORIES to the HEADS OF CHURCHES STATEMENT ON PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

National Heads of Churches

Archbishop Phillip Aspinall, Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia
Rev Dr Ross Clifford, President, Baptist Union of Australia
Lyndsay Farrall, Presiding Clerk, Australia Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Rev Alan Filipaina, Moderator, Congregational Federation of Australia and New Zealand
Rev Gregor Henderson, President of the Uniting Church in Australia
Richard Menteith AM, National President of Churches of Christ in Australia
Archbishop Mor Malatius Malki Malki, Syrian Orthodox Church of Australia and New Zealand
Archbishop Paul Saliba, Antiochian Orthodox Church, Australia and New Zealand
Rev Dr Michael P Semmler, President, Lutheran Church of Australia
Pastor Chester Stanley, National President, Lutheran Church of Australia
Archbishop Stylianos, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church of Australia
Archbishop Philip Wilson, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Other Australia Church Leaders

Patricia Abbott, Member of the Canberra Ecumenical Working Group on Palestine-Israel
Bishop Richard Appleby, President, National Council of Churches in Australia
Andrew Ball, Executive Ministry Director, Churches of Christ in NSW
Rev James Barr, Senior Minister, Canberra Baptist Church
Rev Rod Benson, National Council, Baptist Union of Australia
Dr Kevin Bray, Chair, Canberra Ecumenical Working Group on Palestine-Israel
Francis P Carroll, Emeritus Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn, Catholic Church
Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn, Catholic Church
Most Reverend Peter J Connors, Catholic Bishop of Ballarat
Rev Terence Corkin, General Secretary, Uniting Church in Australia
Bishop Peter Danaher, Vicar-General and Assistant Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Bathurst
Rev Dr Dean Drayton, ex-President, Uniting Church in Australia
Rev Rod Dyson, Moderator, Uniting Church Synod of South Australia
Rev Wendell Flentje, Moderator, Uniting Church Northern Synod
Rev Professor James Haire AM, Executive Director, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture
John Harrower, Anglican Bishop of Tasmania
Rev John Henderson, General Secretary, National Council of Churches in Australia
Bishop Alfred Holland, formerly Anglican Bishop of Newcastle
Gillian Hunt, Canberra City Uniting Church
Rev Dr Jonathan Inkpin, General Secretary, NSW Ecumenical Council
Rev Dr Gregory C Jenks, acting Academic Dean, St Francis Theological College, Brisbane
Rev Merrill Kitchen, Principal, Churches of Christ Theological College
Keith Lyons, General Secretary, Congregational Federation of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand
Rev Alistair Macrae, President-elect, Uniting Church in Australia
Rev Alan Marr, Director of Ministries, Baptist Union of Victoria
Bishop David McCall, Anglican Bishop of Bunbury
Archdeacon Philip Newman OAM, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne
Rev Greg Pietsch, President of the Victorian District, Lutheran Church of Australia
Rev Dr David Pitman, Moderator, Uniting Church Synod of Queensland
Maureen Postma, on behalf of the Victorian Council of Churches
Rev Elenie Poulos, National Director, UnitingJustice Australia
Rev Niall Reid, Moderator, Uniting Church Synod of NSW/ACT
Graeme Rutherford, Assistant Anglican Bishop of Newcastle & Bishop on the Central Coast
Pastor Ken Vogel, General Secretary, Seventh Day Adventist Church in Australia
Rev Robert L Voigt, President of the South Australia/Northern Territory District, Lutheran Church of Australia

Heads of Church-related International Agencies

Steve Bradbury, National Director of TEAR Australia
Tim Costello, CEO of World Vision Australia
Rev John Deane, Executive Director, Anglican Board of Mission - Australia
Rev Dr Kerry Enright, National Director, Uniting International Mission (incl. Uniting Church Overseas Aid)
Dr Les Fussell, National Director, Baptist World Aid Australia
Alistair Gee, Executive Director, Christian World Service, National Council of Churches in Australia
Rev John Gilmore, Executive Director of Churches of Christ Global Mission Partners
Jack de Groot, CEO, Caritas Australia
Alison Preston, Acting CEO, Anglicord