

[OVT-010] On Designating May 15 as the Palestinian Nakba Remembrance Day

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Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

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1. Recommendation
1. Rationale
2. Advocates

Recommendation

The Synod of the Covenant overtures the 224th General Assembly (2020) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:

1. direct the Stated Clerk to designate May 15 as the “Palestinian *Nakba* Remembrance Day” for the purpose of lifting prayer for peace, giving solidarity for those suffering under occupation, and promoting advocacy among PC(USA) members; and
2. direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to include “Palestinian *Nakba* Remembrance Day” on May 15 on future years of the *Presbyterian Planning Calendar*.

Rationale

Christians who were exiled from the holy land grieve for their connection to the Mother Church. A hymn frequently sung by Presbyterians is one that brings to mind the profound loss suffered by these Christians. This hymn, “This Is My Song,” is sung to the tune of Finlandia composed by Jean Sibelius to words written by Lloyd Stone. The first four lines of the hymn are:

This is my song, O God of all the nations,
a song of peace for lands afar and mine.

This is my home, the country where my heart is;

here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine. (*Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, song 340)

To Palestinians who have been exiled from their country and never allowed to return, this song speaks to their hearts and bring tears in remembrance of their profound loss. Their Palestine was their hopes, their dreams, and their holy shrine. It is lost to them, and a remembrance of those hopes and dreams is all that is left.

The Nakba is an Arabic word that translates to “the Catastrophe” and refers to the expulsion by terrorism and force of 750,000 Palestinians, both Christian and Muslim, in 1947–48. Their properties have been expropriated by the Israeli government. They have lost everything—their lands, their homes, and most importantly their communities. And to this day, these people are not allowed to return to their homes and lands.

The PC(USA) has in the past recognized the rights of Palestinians for repatriation or compensation¹; stated concern for the status of Jerusalem to be an international city free and open for all faiths²; advocated for access to the holy places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem and other churches throughout Palestine³; just to name a few. Alas, for Palestinians and Christian Palestinians, access to their holy places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem is difficult and more often than not denied to them. To obtain access, a permit from the Israeli government is required, which is difficult to obtain, and if they do receive a permit, they are subjected to difficult and humiliating checkpoints.

Palestinian Christians express their gratitude for this support in the Kairos Palestine document:

Our word to the Churches of the world is firstly a word of gratitude for the solidarity you have shown toward us in word, deed and presence among us. It is a word of praise for the many Churches and Christians who support the right of the Palestinian people for self determination. It is a message of solidarity with those Christians and Churches who have suffered because of their advocacy for law and justice. ... It is a call to stand alongside the oppressed and preserve the word of God as good news for all.⁴

The insertion of a “Palestinian Nakba Remembrance Day” in the *Presbyterian Planning Calendar* gives solidarity to those Palestinian Americans among us and Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and refugee camps outside Palestine, all who remember and grieve. Our solidarity with them helps to keep hope alive that one day they or their descendants may be able return to their homeland. This is their song, their hope, O God of all the nations.

Endnotes

1. 219th General Assembly (2010), “Breaking Down the Walls”—From the Middle East Study Committee, Overture can be accessed at <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3179>.
2. 223rd General Assembly (2018), A Resolution on the Status of Jerusalem—From the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns. Overture can be accessed at <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3000278>.
3. 219th General Assembly (2010), “Breaking Down the Walls”—From the Middle East Study Committee, Overture can be accessed at <https://www.pc-biz.org/#/search/3179>.
4. Kairos Palestine document’s full title is “A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of [Palestinian](#) suffering” issued in December 2009 by the Christian community in Palestine.