

CORNERSTONE

A PUBLICATION BY SABEEL ECUMENICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY CENTER



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Al-Walaja - Volunteers join local residents in harvesting olives in groves that will be cut off from their owners in Al-Walaja once the Israeli separation barrier completely surrounds the town as planned

IN THIS ISSUE

International Friends of Sabeel	1
Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man	2
Friends of Sabeel Australia Incorporated (FOSAI)	4
Canadian Friends of Sabeel	7
Friends of Sabeel France	10
Friends of Sabeel Germany	12
Friends of Sabeel - Ireland	14
Friends of Sabeel The Netherlands	15
Friends of Sabeel Norway	18
Friends of Sabeel Scandanavia / Sweden	20
Friends of Sabeel UK	21
Friends of Sabeel North America	23

International Friends of Sabeel

In this issue of Cornerstone we are highlighting International Friends of Sabeel. Like the friends in the story from Mark (Bible study, p.2) who carried their friend to healing, these friends from around the world have taken up the call for justice in Israel and Palestine. Their solidarity visits, their educational programs, their advocacy, their support and their prayers continue to give us hope. Their commitment and faithfulness is a needed reminder that we are not alone in our struggle for a just peace.

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

Mark 2:1-12 - Bible Study

By Sabeel Staff and International Friends

This very familiar story is found in the 3 Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. It takes place in Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, which had become the home base for Jesus' ministry. Jesus' healing and teaching had begun to draw great crowds and we see in this story that the house where he was staying was filled and overflowing with his followers, people wanting to hear his teaching and looking for healing. It was into this crowd that the men came, four of them carrying a paralyzed man who they hoped would be cured by Jesus' healing touch. But the crowd made it impossible for them to reach Jesus. So, what did they do? They carried the man up onto the roof, made an opening and lowered him into the presence of Jesus.

Let's stop here and examine what we have already read, especially as it relates to our current situation. For those of us who live in Palestine or who have visited, it is easy to draw comparisons to life here today. The story reminds us of the close social network that still exists. Jesus is already drawing large crowds; people have been telling their neighbors

about this man who speaks with authority and who performs miraculous healings. The house is full when he arrives at this home in Capernaum; the door is open to all to come in and listen to his words. Palestinian hospitality is evident. All are welcome.

The house where Jesus is staying is a typical home, a simple house with probably a roof made of dried grass or hay. When the men can't gain entry through the door, they go to the roof, dig through the hay and are able to make an opening through which they can lower their friend.

And Jesus sees their faith. The men believed that Jesus could physically heal their friend but what happened next surprised all present. Jesus forgave his sins. This caused an uproar among members of the Sanhedrin, the teachers of the law who were present. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus knew what they were thinking and challenged them, eventually showing that he not only had authority to forgive, but also performed the physical miracle of healing the paralyzed man with the words, "... get up, take your mat and go home." And everyone present was amazed and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

In Palestine today we see this same scenario carried out daily. People suffering from illnesses, people injured in the wave of violence that is affecting everyday life, people looking for healing but finding obstacles in their way. Checkpoints and the separation wall make it nearly impossible to access hospitals in Jerusalem where healing could be offered. Friends look for creative

ways to bring healing but obstacles are difficult to overcome.

But this story doesn't just point to the obvious comparisons. It has larger implications. Let's look at two of these.

When we read this story in Palestine today, it is easy to draw comparisons between the characters in the parable and the current situation. First, we look at the paralyzed man. We don't know his history, whether or not he has been paralyzed since birth or from an accident later in life. But we do know that he is completely dependent on his friends and possibly his family for his care. Has he given up on ever being healed? Has he heard of Jesus' healing miracles and pleaded with his friends to help? Or perhaps his friends have brought him on their own initiative to this encounter. Whatever the case, these friends show great determination and creativity. They refuse to be stopped by the crowds and look for a solution, a way, to come into Jesus' presence. They do not give up. Their faith in Jesus' healing power motivates them to persist.

Can we compare the paralyzed man to Palestine? Is Palestine today "paralyzed" by the occupation and the failure of the world to act? Have the people lost hope that there will ever be peace, a just peace? Are there friends (nations, political and/or religious leaders, NGO's) who have the will, the determination, the courage and the creativity to brave the "crowds" of opposition in order to bring Palestine to a place where a just peace can be achieved?

But, while gratefully acknowledging their friends, especially here at Sabeel where we are so very thankful for



International friends working at Sabeel Jerusalem

Friends of Sabeel around the world and for their faithful commitment to works of peace and justice, the Palestinian people are tired of being “carried.” They want a life of independence and of dignity. And while the help of friends is needed and appreciated, they don’t want to continue this dependent existence; they want to be able to “pick up their mat and go home,” home to a state of their own.

Is the peace process itself “paralyzed?” And, if so, who are the friends and what kind of creativity and determination will it take to bring an end to the occupation so that all might be healed?

Perhaps all of us can identify with this man. It is so very easy to feel helpless in the face of so much opposition and power but the determination and the courage of the friends give us hope. We are not alone. We must not lose faith. We must believe that justice will prevail.

But there is another aspect to this story—a theme of faith and forgiveness. Jesus not only offered this man physical healing; he offered spiritual healing in the words of forgiveness. The occupation has been brutal and its effects are felt in all aspects of life. These effects are not just physical; they also affect

our spirit, our soul. Even if physical healing takes place in the form of the end of the occupation, Israel and Palestine will still need a deeper healing, a healing that erases hate, revenge and anger. An inner healing of body, mind and soul. A healing that leads to reconciliation and the ultimate goal of forgiveness.

And when this healing takes place, when this paralysis called occupation ends, and a just peace is achieved, let us hope that those who are witnesses will see the justice and mercy of God at work, that reconciliation and forgiveness will prevail and that the whole world will be amazed and give glory to God.

Friends of Sabeel Australia Incorporated [FOSAI]



Worship at Shepherd's Field, Beit Sahour. Part of "Come and See" – Swedish Conference

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THE FOUNDING OF FOSAI

Friends of Sabeel Australia Inc.

[FOSAI] was established in Australia in August, 2003. Its foundation was due to the initiative of Ray Barraclough who, in the early 1990s, had worked for the Anglican Church in East Jerusalem. At the inaugural meeting the following people were elected to the FOSAI Management Committee: Ray Barraclough, Greg Jenks, Clarrie Gomersall, Sister Gillian Gardner SSA and John Roberts.

FOSAI saw itself as an ecumenical support group for the *Sabeel*

Liberation Theology Center that was founded by Naim Ateek and based in Jerusalem.

As regards its Australian (and New Zealand)[1] context, FOSAI had as its aims:

- A. Increasing the awareness of Australian Christians about the vision, aspirations and activities of *Sabeel* and of the wider circle of Palestinian Christians in their homeland.
- B. Disseminating information about the life-situation of Palestinians, particularly those living in the occupied territories.
- C. Distributing copies of the *Sabeel* journal *Cornerstone* to the members and supporters of FOSAI.
- D. Encouraging members and supporters of FOSAI to attend international conferences that *Sabeel* sponsors.
- E. Seeking to make pertinent contributions to Australian public discussion and policy in regard to the aspirations and experiences of the Palestinian people.

SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF FOSAI IN ACTION

The following serve as examples of the quest to implement such aims as regards items **A** and **E**.

A. The Rev'd Dr Greg Jenks and Sr Gillian brought a motion to the Synod of Brisbane Anglican Diocese that, amongst a number of points listed in the motion, urged that Synod to "*Affirm the faith and mission of the Palestinian Christian communities and commit this Diocese to stand in solidarity with them in their present time of crisis*".

The motion was passed formally without debate at the Synod. There was no dissenting vote.

E. At various times *FOSAI* has written either to the Prime Minister or to the Foreign Affairs Minister in regard to Australian government policy affecting the Palestinian people. For example, to the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd:

Dear Mr Rudd,

On behalf of the *Friends of Sabeel Oceania* [2] we wish to express our strong support for the Australian government's action in regard to Australia's vote at the United Nations over the weekend of 9-10 September, 2008. *Friends of Sabeel Oceania's* membership consists largely of Christians in Australia and New Zealand who seek a peaceful and just resolution to the relationship of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

We refer to the newspaper reports (eg *The Canberra Times** and *The Sydney Morning Herald*) which informed us that in *votes at UN headquarters in New York, Australia supported a resolution calling on Israel to stop establishing settlements in Palestinian territories*. It also supported a resolution calling for the Geneva Conventions to apply to the Palestinian Territories.

* *The Canberra Times* Tuesday, November 11 2008 p.4.

As we understand it, according to international law the settlements that the government of Israel constructs in the occupied territories are illegal.

We strongly support the Australian government's support for the appropriate Geneva Conventions that are applicable to the Palestinian Territories.

FOSAI also wrote to the current Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julia Bishop, as follows:

As a letter writer in *The Sydney Morning Herald* noted recently there is a contradiction in the Australian government's position. That government asserts that it supports a two state solution. Yet it tacitly condones settlement construction which threatens to destroy any hope of the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Therefore, I would be grateful if you could respond to my following questions:

1. Which of the two contradictory policies noted above does the Australian government actually endorse – a two state solution or support for illegal Jewish settlements?
2. What values influence the Australian government to give tacit approval for the building of more illegal settlements on Palestinian territory?
3. Does the Australian government oppose the American government's view when the latter contends that continued settlement activity is illegal?

The reply from Julia Bishop [19 March, 2014] included the following:

...Australia strongly supports resumed final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, aimed at reaching a just and lasting two-state solution, with Israel and a Palestinian state existing side by side in peace and security within internationally-recognised borders.

The Government's position on the issue of Israeli settlements is that it is a key point of negotiations for any resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian border. The Government will not pre-empt the outcome of ongoing negotiations...

Postscript: The 2015 National Conference of the *Australian Labor Party* adopted a resolution which, among many items, '*restated (that) the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is occupied territory*'.

PATRONS

From the founding of *FOSAI*, a number of prominent Australian church people agreed to become patrons of *FOSAI*. They represent an ecumenical listing. These included:

Bishop Peter Carnley
 Bishop Roger Herft
 Bishop John Noble
 Bishop George Browning
 Sr Josephine Warne CHN
 Dr Noel Preston
 Dr Lorna Hallahan
 Rev'd Dr James Haire
 Bishop John Gerry
 Rev'd Tim Costello (World Vision)

PRAYERS IN ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, MELBOURNE

In 2013, Fr Jim Minchin took the initiative in cooperation with the staff of *St Paul's Cathedral* for a *Session of Prayer* each Thursday commencing

at noon. Its focus is the situation in Israel/Palestine. Such a gathering seeks God's liberating spirit of power and justice to advance the cause of a just peace in the region.

MEMBER OF APAN

FOSAI is a member of the *Australian Palestine Advocacy Network [APAN]*.

APAN was founded as a way of connecting various groups – NGOs, church groups, trade unions, refugees and others – to lobby for more substantial support by Australia for Palestinian aspirations for the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. In particular it seeks to inform Australian federal politicians about the current experience of the Palestinian people. The current President of *APAN* is Bishop George Browning.

GOOD WISHES FOR SABEEL

We are aware that there have been major changes taking place in *Sabeel* since the retirement of the Rev'd Naim Ateek. For its part *FOSAI* hopes to make a constructive contribution in supporting *Sabeel* as it continues its important role in working for the welfare of the Palestinian people.

1. Beside those who have served as President of *FOSAI*: Ray Barraclough, Greg Jenks, Jim Minchin, John Stewart and David Smith. New Zealand member Jenny Te Paa has served as a Vice-President.
2. *FOSAI* has also been known as Friends of Sabeel Oceania Inc.

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SAVE THE DATES

Living Together – An Interfaith Mosaic - A Window into the Religious Communities Living in The Land of The Holy One.
Spring Witness Visit:
 May 10th – May 18th

Come & See – Go & Tell
 Fall Witness Visit:
 November 2nd – November 10th

**100 Years Since the Balfour Declaration**

Sabeel 10th International Conference:
 March 7th – March 13th

Christian Zionism and Colonialism – A Response from Palestinian Christians
 Fall Witness Visit:
 November 1st – November 9th



The Forgotten Faithful - A Window into the Life and Witness of Christians in The Land of The Holy One
 Spring Witness Visit:
 Feb. 28th – March 8th

Come & See – Go & Tell
 Fall Witness Visit:
 October 30th – November 7th

Canadian Friends of Sabeel



Photo EAPPI

Protective presence for Palestinian school children - Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel

Beginnings

In November 1997, Sabeel Board Member Cedar Duaybis met with a group from the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa just as they were finishing their visit of the Occupied Territories in Jerusalem. After hearing of their experiences imbued with their shock at the cruelty of the occupation and how it was affecting the Church, Cedar serenely asked, "So now you're stuck with the truth; what are you going to do about it?"

At the time, that was perhaps a most provocative question for this unassuming group, which included the Bishop of Ottawa, John Baycroft. Yet so begins the story of Canadian Friends of Sabeel.

At the Christmas Eve midnight mass the next month, Bishop Baycroft preached an innocuous sermon on his experience in Bethlehem. The main newspaper in the capital,

The Ottawa Citizen, published the headline, "Bishop Slams Israel's evil." Predictably, it drew widespread criticism in the letters to the editor, from the Israeli Embassy and the Lobby including the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), which didn't hesitate to provide directives on what is appropriate for preaching the Gospel!

In any event, Bishop Baycroft reiterated he had nothing to apologize for, and standing his ground decided to call for a conference in Ottawa on Justice and Peace in the Holy Land. A key turning point in the conference occurred when a CJC representative invoked the Holocaust in a question to the panel, which brought a hushed silence until panelist and Jewish theologian Dr. Marc Ellis responded that the Israel lobby would not silence those who felt compelled to give voice to the truth about Palestine.

Accordingly, out of the conference workshops, participants decided that an appropriate initiative was a solidarity organization to accompany Sabeel. The mandate of CFOS has primarily focused on support to Sabeel Jerusalem on a partnership model, and through education and advocacy in Canada.

Planning around CFOS structure and programming was eclipsed by fast moving events on the ground and consequently, the most enduring structure of CFOS became the National Steering Committee, later the Board. The Board has met on a monthly or quarterly basis, mainly by telephone and occasionally in face-to-face meetings.

Almost all of us were in our 30s at the time, now in our 50s! They included Monica Lambton (still in her 30s, forever young) who is still on the Board, and who volunteered at Sabeel

in the early '90s, and myself, who served at the same time as Director of the Jerusalem office of the Middle East Council of Churches ('92-'95) and Anglican Vicar of Gaza. Several Board members then and since have served in the Occupied Territories, including well known people who had done so for many years, such as current members Kathy Bergen and Cathy Nichols.

The 1998 conference was supported by FOSNA, and we began as a chapter of FOSNA but quickly struck out on our own. I have also been a Board member of FOSNA since its founding, and recently we have developed a closer relationship with them to our mutual benefit.

Memorable moments

Also that year, Sabeel issued the 50th anniversary commemorative Photo Exhibit of al-Nakba with Canadian assistance. FOSNA produced 10 copies and gave us one, which we moved around the country. When the Canadian Jewish Congress complained that it was displayed in the rotunda of Toronto City Hall, Canada's largest circulation paper, *The Toronto Star*, wrote a positive piece on the exhibit, quickly putting Canadian Friends of Sabeel in the public eye. The mayor then responded critically, forcing him to have a meeting with us and the Canadian Arab Federation at which time he issued an apology.

CFOS worked with Sabeel to develop the renewed 60th anniversary edition of the photo exhibit in 2008, updating it for the 65th anniversary, and then digitizing it as a free download at our website <http://>

necfabeel.ca/?page_id=1107.

In 2000, shortly after the photo exhibit controversy, the second Intifada broke out and as CFOS Chair, I was called upon to do much public speaking, including on Parliament Hill which received some media coverage and exposure for CFOS. I was also invited to travel with United Church minister Rev. Tad Mitsui to Palestine on a fact-finding mission and to deliver a message of support from Canadian church leaders to Palestinian church leaders. When the news of the church leaders' support for Palestinian colleagues was leaked to the CJC, they successfully sabotaged the letter, leaving us waiting in Jerusalem for a letter that never arrived. This proved to be embarrassing to the mainline churches and left the Arab community upset. A CFOS arranged presentation by Fr. Assaly and Rev. Mitsui to this community strengthened solidarity links to Canadian Christians and Arab-Canadians but relationships with the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC)—which at the time was responsible for any official church leaders' letters—were damaged.

At around this same time, Inter-Church Action hosted a round table on Palestine. The CCC President, the Most Rev. Archbishop of Calgary, was present, as were Canon Naim Ateek and Jean Zaru from Sabeel. The truth about CJC systematic silencing surfaced, and reshaped the Middle East work of the Canadian Churches, isolating it from the influence of the Israel Lobby as the CJC was the Jewish partner in the national Christian-Jewish dialogue.

In retrospect, this became the watershed moment of waning influence of the Lobby in the churches. After a series of 'difficult' moments exposing the CJC over subsequent years, the 40 year old official national Christian-Jewish dialogue was suspended, freeing the churches to address honestly the justice issues raised by the Palestinian churches and organizations.

A couple of years later, we held a conference in Toronto and published the proceedings in a book, *Stuck with the Truth*, and later a video by the same name. This drew a lot more interest in our work. While there was much work, including a daily e-news service before the days of high-speed internet, our next conference was in 2005 in Toronto. This was an international gathering for NGOs on Sabeel's "Morally Responsible Investment" document. We brought together 150 NGOs from Canada, the US and Europe to consider the question of what was quickly becoming known as BDS.

In those years CFOS hosted several speaking tours of Canon Naim Ateek and other Sabeel leaders from Palestine. This helped develop relationships at several levels between the national churches, Sabeel and the Jerusalem churches. As a result, the Canadian churches and Church Related Organizations (CRO) became Sabeel's largest funder for a few short years. This came to an abrupt halt in 2009, in a national political scandal when the Canadian government falsely accused Kairos Canada, the ecumenical justice umbrella, of anti-Semitism in its work in Palestine. It then defunded

Kairos (and several other CROs and even governmental organizations) supporting progressive justice work in Palestine and Israel.

Due to the circumstances, and in response to the Kairos Palestine document, CFOS convened the Canadian churches and CROs, the broadest meeting of such groups in Canada on the issue of Palestine, and have been doing so around a table in Toronto ever since, in what is known as the Forum. This provides us all an opportunity to coordinate and support one another's work on Palestine, and out of which came initiatives towards BDS.

Current initiatives

For the past five years we have been able to maintain a half- or full-time position of a Programme Coordinator. Our new Coordinator is the multi-talented Sharone Daniel, who, is also leading our Organizational Development. Our major project this year has been the North American "Seeking the New Jerusalem" conference in Vancouver http://necfsabeel.ca/?page_id=973, sponsored by CFOS, FOSNA, and the Presbyterian, United and Anglican churches of Canada. Several initiatives have come out of this, including an upcoming round table on Divestment to help the churches explore the issue.

Also, two exciting programmes emerged as part of the CFOS effort to develop a concept we coined a couple of years ago – Authentic Christian Pilgrimage (ACP). While we have dreams to internationalize the concept that helps churches understand what authentic Holy

Land pilgrimage entails, these two initiatives have set us on course. At last year's Kairos Palestine conference in Bethlehem, a dynamic speaker from Ireland, Gearóid Ó Cuinn outlined a project of Irish Lawyers for Human Rights, to educate pilgrims on the reality of the Holy Land by using consumer law to require tour operators to properly describe their trips. This means no more "Jerusalem (or Bethlehem), Israel" or unidentified trips to settlements. After their success in Ireland and penetrating into the EU, Gearóid addressed the Vancouver conference by Skype, which launched a similar initiative in Canada. The Americans are watching our project to see if it can then be implemented in the USA.

The other nascent programme is developing an official certification for ACP Itineraries. If this catches on, it is possible that in the future church groups would be inclined to only travel on a certified itinerary, which could change the way pilgrimage looks on the ground.

Recently, for our annual James Graff Memorial Lecture, we hosted Sara Roy speaking on Gaza, with over 200 in attendance. The audio is available at our website link <http://necfsabeel.ca/>

This is a prelude to a national speaking tour of a Gazan we expect to organize in 2016 with the Canadian churches. Over the years, CFOS has developed some meaningful partnerships in Gaza, and at a minimum been able to tangibly express solidarity through

these painful years.

In terms of advocacy, we have experienced in Canada a decade of darkness with a government pandering to populist evangelical sentiment on Israel. However, CFOS is currently in the midst of a campaign to have Canada vote intelligently on November 25 on the annual package of resolutions at the UN on Palestine. We have asked the new Foreign Minister for a meeting with us and the churches. Every indication is that the new government sworn in last week intends to overturn much of the legislation and practices of the previous decade, including pulling our military out of Iraq and Syria even in light of the terrible events in Paris. Hopefully a new government brings a new day and hopes to restore Canada's credibility in and throughout the region. We look forward to again dialoguing with them.

And mostly we look forward to the exciting mission and programmes we are called to by virtue of our Christian faith. The opportunity to further ministries of justice and peace in solidarity and partnership with our partners in Palestine continues to energize and empower us.

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Friends of Sabeel France



Photo EAPPI

Witness Visit - Quiet time at the Sea of Galilee

It all started with an Ecumenical Accompaniment mission by a retired French pastor in April 2004. His name: Gilbert Charbonnier. After a few days, the person in charge of the EAPPI volunteers fell ill and was replaced by a member of the Sabeel staff in Jerusalem. This gave Gilbert the opportunity to discover something completely new to him. A bit later, the whole group of EAPPI volunteers were invited to share one day of the 5th International Conference of Sabeel, on *Challenging Christian Zionism*. Gilbert also had the opportunity to talk to Rev. Naim Ateek. All this was new to him, but he was soon convinced that it was important, and started studying Palestinian Liberation Theology.

Already convinced of the major significance of the Israeli-Palestinian 'conflict' on the geopolitical level as well as on the level of inter-religious dialogue, he came to realize that his next mission was to share his

experience and discoveries with his fellow Christians in the various churches of France. To his surprise, there was a greater interest in Catholic than in Protestant circles. This brought him to collaborate with the ecumenical organization, "*Chrétiens de la Méditerranée*".

After attending the 7th International Conference of Sabeel in Nov. 2008, focusing on *The Nakba*, a project to create a special association on a French national level and in an ecumenical spirit matured. It materialized on June 17, 2010, in the city of Avignon, when the association *Amis de Sabeel France / Friends of Sabeel France* officially came into existence. Pastor Gilbert Charbonnier was elected as its first president. In June 2012, Pastor Ernest Reichert, who had a long relationship with Middle Eastern churches, took over as president. We currently have 9 members of the Board coming from all over France

and rooted in the Catholic as well as in Protestant churches.

Today we have about 150 members. One of our major aims is to increase the awareness of our church members and leaders of the importance of the Israeli-Palestinian issue on all levels, the more so since the real issues at stake are not really apprehended by our church congregations, and that their leading bodies have never officially and publicly taken a position on the *Kairos Palestine Document*. We have the impression that their main concern is to avoid hurting in any way the religious Jewish communities in France. This however should not hinder them from coming down in favor of justice.

For this reason, we strive to work on two levels: to discourage a predetermined reading of Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, so as to counter a

conscious or unconscious Christian Zionist reading, and to dispatch widely the information transmitted, mainly through Sabeel, on the situation on the ground, the concerns and challenges the Palestinian people face in the Holy Land today. That is why we translate every week into French the Sabeel *Wave of Prayer*, as well as other documents like *Cornerstone*, or the *Christmas and Easter Alerts*, and send them to about 800 addresses. And many of the addressees of these documents dispatch them again to their own networks, so that the information reaches more than 1000 people. This way we can compare ourselves to the yeast in the dough.

Having this in mind, we organized, together with the association *Chrétiens de la Méditerranée*, a symposium in Paris on June 1st, 2013 on the theme *'From Christian Zionism to the Kairos-Palestine Document'*. Speakers from various Church backgrounds, Palestinian as well as French, presented the issues at stake, the position of their Churches, and how to confront various biblical readings. Bishop Elias Chacour and Mrs. Nora Carmi introduced the participants to the Palestinian situation as they experience it. And thanks to the dedication of members of our Board, we were able to propose the complete proceedings of the symposium by the end of the same year.

We also translated into French and published the book *'A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation'* by Rev. Naim Ateek. Unfortunately, we were not able to sell many copies of it, which made us once more aware of the limits of our project. But we

continue and are about to publish the translation of Jean Zaru's book *'Occupied with Nonviolence'*, another Palestinian witness to peaceful resistance. We also regularly translate and dispatch the documents for the yearly *World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel*, as well as other PIEF (Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum) documents.

On another level, we have managed to convince some French young people to participate in Sabeel Summer Youth Gatherings. On their return, they shared their experience with their friends and fellows, and thus spread new awareness on often unknown issues. And at our General Assemblies, which take place in a different town of France every year, we invite witnesses such as former EAPPI volunteers or filmmakers to share their own recent experiences on the ground. We have also questioned, and invited others to question political leaders on their position regarding the Israel-Palestine issues.

The great project we are presently working on is to organize, together with the French Protestant Federation, a Symposium for people having responsibilities in the main Christian Churches in France. It will take place at the beginning of March 2016 in Paris, with the participation of some Church leaders from Palestine, in view of sharing the realities and the challenges Christians have to face in Israel and Palestine today.

Our challenges remain constant: change the minds, primarily of Christian people, in our country. There are quite a number of secular organizations in France taking

the defense of the freedom and dignity of the Palestinian people and promoting BDS actions. We collaborate with them on personal levels, point to widespread attitudes in our church circles that are close to Christian Zionism, and try to also penetrate the Evangelical world – which is quite difficult because of these very Christian Zionist attitudes. Another difficulty is that people publicly advocating BDS initiatives are presently prosecuted by law in France, which we cannot admit.

We may also have to develop contacts with Jewish, Moslem, and other religious organizations concerned with the issues we want to face, though such contacts already exist on personal levels. The Palestinian experience certainly can be very helpful to us in our local and national challenges related to a multicultural, multi-religious, and also a very secularized society. We are also aware of the importance of exchanging information with other Chapters of Friends of Sabeel in Europe and elsewhere. Our main task, however, appears to be promoting the Sabeel and biblical values of justice, peace, reconciliation, and living together in spite of all kinds of differences, with the constant refusal of any resort to violence. The way all these values are embodied in the struggle of our Palestinian brothers and sisters is a great help for us. However few we may be, we will not give up.

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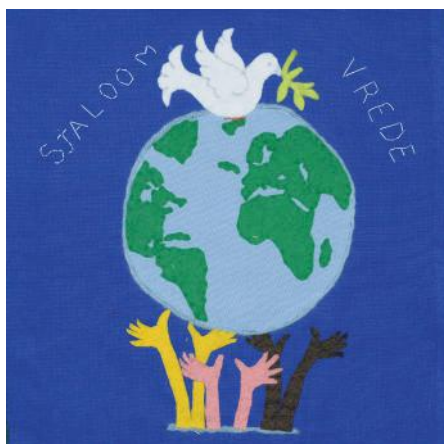
Introduction

Friends of Sabeel (FOS) Germany was initially formed in 2007 as a result of a personal encounter with Rev. Naim Ateek on the occasion of visiting Palestine/Jerusalem. With their activities, FOS Germany are committed to justice and peace for Palestine and Israel. In cooperation with other organisations, lectures and events are provided, educating church audiences and the wider public about the root causes and current problems of the conflict and calling for a just peace for both parties. The FOS members meet at least three times a year, exchanging information, planning activities and getting involved in theological and political reflections.

Publications

On the initiative and the strong support of the German FOS, the book *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* by Rev. Naim Ateek was published in German (*Gerechtigkeit und Versöhnung*) in 2010. With this book, for the first time, a profound theological work about Palestinian liberation theology was made available to the German audience.

Recently a unique book called *Recht ströme wie Wasser* (Let Justice Roll Down like Waters) was published. It provides interesting and challenging reading for a calendar year independent of weekdays. With quotations from Israeli and Palestinian authors, Jews, Christians and Muslims, from the Bible, the Talmud and the Koran, the daily reading contributes facts and figures, opinions and feelings ,



Sabeel Peace Tapestry 2008 - Dutch

and clarifications and justifications from all kinds of positions collected to present an overall view provided by people of all walks of life to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Lectures

To inform and to build awareness in local parishes and the wider public, FOS offers and runs lectures by FOS members disseminating experiences gained on the ground through educational tours in Israel/Palestine. Some members have cooperated with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel, having served terms in Palestine.

Dialogue

For the churches in Germany, the Christian-Jewish dialogue plays an important role due to the legacy of the Shoa (Holocaust). As a result, a theology after Auschwitz has been developed reflecting the theological Anti-Judaism entrenched in much of church history. This process has led to a deeper understanding about the two religions and coined in a new way the relationship between the two faiths. But, of course, the

churches' mainstream feels that the fruits of this effort should not be touched and disturbed by the political Palestinian agenda resulting in accusations and subsequently feared delegitimation of Israel.

Advocacy Work

The churches and parishes in Germany reacted in a very reserved way, if at all, to the cry expressed by the Kairos Palestine Document. Due to various reasons, church authorities deny to really get involved in the conflict. Therefore it is still our concern to press for more involvement and advocacy work.

This is done through letters to church institutions, letters to editors and responding to articles in publications. Only recently FOS Germany has sent a plea to all Protestant regional churches in Germany pointing out the deplorable situation in Palestine, indicating the systematic violation of human rights by Israel and calling on the churches' responsibility.

Events

In order to offer reliable information backed up by personal experience, FOS Germany has over the years organized lectures with Palestinian, Jewish and other experts often in cooperation with other NGO's like the German Kairos Palestine Solidarity Network, Pax Christi and Friends of Al Kalima Bethlehem Association.

Well known lecturers like Mark Braverman (USA), Rolf Verleger (Germany), Max Blumenthal (USA), Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb (Bethlehem), Sumaya Farhat Naser (Birzeit),

Jeff Halper (Jerusalem) and Eitan Bronstein Aparicio from Zochrot (Israel) were welcomed and served as excellent witnesses. To illustrate the situation, films were also employed like "Within The Eye of The Storm" or "The Iron Wall".

The biggest German Protestant Convention (Deutsche Evangelische Kirchentag), held in Stuttgart 2015, served as an excellent opportunity to draw attention to the Israel/Palestine conflict and to highlight the issue in public.

An outspoken and supporting letter to the Palestinian cause by The Most Rev. Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus, South Africa, addressed to the Kirchentag, called for urgent attention to churches and the visitors to the event. Alongside, special lectures were organized with Rev. Naim Ateek as well as with Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, Mark Braverman, Dr. Helga Baumgarten, Jeff Halper and Bishop em. Eberhardt Renz (ret.) and Thomas Maria Renz and politicians of different parties. During the two day event altogether more than 1800 visitors were welcomed.

The Kairos Palestine Document

Since the launch of the Kairos Palestine Document in December 2009, FOS Germany has paid great attention to the challenges and cry for help of the Christians in Palestine. The situation of the German Protestant churches in responding to the document was reported by Gerhard Dilschneider, member of FOS Germany, to the Kairos Palestine 5th Anniversary Conference held in Bethlehem, December 2014.

The complete report dealing with the rather disappointing responses by the German Protestant churches

is available from the author (dilschneider@gmx.net)

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

The state of Israel's policy of occupation and discrimination – and not the Jewish people – is aimed at in the Kairos Palestine appeal to support BDS....For the German churches even this quest is not at all "acceptable" and across the board rejected. The churches' position refers to the historical experience with the Nazis' racist program "don't buy from Jews". By referring to the German history the BDS call is almost silenced. Avoiding BDS, the churches overlook the fact that during the Nazi time this policy was pursued to exclude, humiliate and destroy the life of one section of the population on a racial basis, whereas the BDS movement is meant to enforce justice, freedom and self-determination for all members of the society in Israel and Palestine according to universal human rights....

Summary of the Churches' Response

German churches express their solidarity with Judaism witnessing to God's faithfulness towards his chosen people. Driven by a guilt-complex resulting from the holocaust, the state of Israel is unconditionally supported. This is linked with the unquestioned acceptance of the narrative of Israeli victimhood in regard to its history and present. Though the "cry for hope in the face of despair" is heard, at the same time rather strong reservations are formulated over and against the facts on the ground as presented by KPD. It is obvious that the institutional church does not

really see and perceive what is going on in Palestine....

Even a reproach is formulated: the KPD is "dramatizing the situation". One has the impression that the representatives of the German churches know better what is going on in Palestine and even paternalistic tones are not being avoided. The impression appears that KPD is discredited as theologically unsound and politically unacceptable. By studying the German churches' responses ...one gains the impression that a low profile and an uncommitted position is preferred. Convincing suggestions showing their willingness and solidarity to participate in the struggle are more or less missing. Even the worsening oppression does not provoke any bold or clear action and to get involved in a long-term advocacy process is not reflected.

Marc Braverman (USA) states: "The Christian impulse for reconciliation has morphed into theological support for an anachronistic, ethnic nationalist ideology that has hijacked Judaism, continues to fuel a global conflict, and has produced one of the most systematic and long standing violations of human rights in the world today."

by Ernst-Ludwig Vatter and Gerhard Dilschneider

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Friends of Sabeel - Ireland

Friends of Sabeel-Ireland was set up in 2003 in Dublin. Earlier in that Year, Dr. Naim Ateek had come to Ireland and met people from local churches – clergy and lay – who wanted to hear of his experience and to see in what way we might be able to support the aims of Sabeel. Aware that other countries had formed “Friends of Sabeel,” for instance Canada, Australia and the UK, the new committee decided to explore the practicalities and formally established Friends of Sabeel-Ireland.

The first public meeting was held at St. Brigid’s Parish Stillorgan, in south Dublin, and welcomed Garth Hewitt, a renowned gospel singer and human rights activist, who had been regularly visiting the Middle East for the previous 15 years. Those who formed the first Sabeel-Ireland committee were: the Rev’d K.H. Thompson (Chairman), the Rev’d D. Moynan (Vice-Chair), Mrs May Byrne (Treasurer), Fr. Tim Murphy, the Rev’d Sandra Pragnell, Alan and Marie Geraghty and Alma Kavanagh.

Meetings were held either every month or bi-monthly in Taney, Dundrum, with the encouragement of the Rev’d Des Sinnamon. The Sabeel-Ireland constitution was adopted in September 2003, during a visit from Dr. Ateek. Sabeel-Ireland received its charitable status in October 2003.

The 5th International Sabeel Conference took place in Jerusalem in April 2004, attended by the Rev’d Ken Thompson, representing Ireland, and over 500 participants

from around the world. For the Thompsons, it was a shock to see the deterioration of Bethlehem compared with their visit to that holy city 7 years earlier. The first public meeting in Ireland was in October 2004. That same month, Garth Hewitt put on another concert which raised awareness of the Palestinian issues for a wider audience.



Sabeel Peace Tapestry 2008 - International

In November 2005, we again welcomed Dr. Ateek in Dublin when he addressed a gathering at the Milltown Institute on the 10 requirements for peace, including: the issues of occupation, the loss of Palestinian land, Gaza, demolition of homes, the right of return, illegal West Bank settlements, a call for Jerusalem to be open to the three faith traditions, educational programmes for peace and democracy. During that visit, Sister Celine Mangan OP addressed the conference under the title, “Land and the Bible – Land and the people of Israel-Palestine – Towards an Inclusive Theology.”

In 2005, Trinity College Dublin hosted a theological seminar and

open discussion on the theme of the future of the Holy Land and its people, with Dr. Ateek as the Keynote speaker.

Also in 2005, Wesley College hosted a workshop led by Mrs Jennifer Sinnamon on the issues facing Palestinian Christians.

During this time, members of Friends of Sabeel and many in their congregations, supported Sabeel by importing Palestinian goods and crafts for sale in the churches.

FOS Ireland continues to be involved in issues of Palestinian advocacy as well as sending representatives to the international conference held in Jerusalem in 2013.

We join Friends of Sabeel around the world in prayers for an end to the occupation and the coming of a just peace.

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Friends of Sabeel The Netherlands



Witness Visit – Jenin olive harvest

Friends of Sabeel NL was founded in 2007 on August 25th. That day was a special day: a representative from Sabeel Jerusalem, Jonathan Kuttab, came to the Netherlands to be present and to deliver a lecture.

Preparation for the foundation started in 2006. Within the Protestant Church a department was working on subjects concerning the Middle East. That department was familiar with the work of Sabeel and organized workshops to alert people to the situation of the Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land. Unfortunately, there were some problems within the Protestant Church, such as the organisation 'Church and Israel,' and so the Middle East group decided to be independent: the task group Turningpoint. This task group decided

in cooperation with Church in Action, ICCO etc. to create Friends of Sabeel NL.

Friends of Sabeel NL works to support the vision of Sabeel in the Netherlands: working for a just peace for the people of Palestine and Israel in a nonviolent way and by promoting reconciliation.

Our aim is to support Palestinian Christians in their nonviolent protest against the occupation and to help them to live their life under Israeli government and occupation. We want to alert Christians in our own country to understand the plight of Palestinian Christians. And we want to give publicity to the Israeli organisations that stand up for human rights.

The board of FOSNL consists of 10 people, most of whom are theologians or ministers except for our treasurer who is a very capable economist. The board meets regularly to discuss theological viewpoints and organize activities.

Friends of Sabeel NL works for a just peace through several activities: We organise national conferences for members and other people who are interested (and hopefully will become members). During these conferences there are speakers, among them Radiah Qubti and Joni Espar (Zochrot), who give lectures and lead workshops.

In 2014 there were two important meetings. In January there was a special symposium because of the doctoral dissertation defence of Janneke Stegeman, then member of the board. At the symposium, Mitri Raheb, minister in Bethlehem and co-writer of the Kairos-document, and Mark Braverman, director of Kairos USA, delivered speeches. In her dissertation 'Decolonizing Jeremiah: Identity, Narratives and Power in Religious Tradition' Janneke Stegeman analyzes constructions of identity within Jeremiah 32 and its ongoing reception history. The latter includes its contemporary reception in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In September that year a conference was organised during the national Peace Week. At the conference a former member of parliament, Anja Meulenbelt (politician) who is very dedicated to the problems of the Palestinians, especially in Gaza, was our guest and contributed to the success of that conference. A speaker also was Debby Farber of Zochrot (the Israeli NGO raising the Nakba to the awareness of the Jewish public). During the afternoon a movie was shown about four survivors of the Holocaust who criticise the policy of the Israeli government.

We had conferences with special guests from Palestine: Naim Ateek and Susan Nathan. In March 2015 we organised a meeting where the movie "The Stones Cry Out" was shown and where Daoud Nassar gave a presentation. Due to the publicity mainly given by the churches those conferences are rather well attended.

The last conference was held this year on October 9th in Amsterdam where the book of Mitri Raheb was

presented. His book *Faith in the Face of Empire* has been translated by members of FOSNL and Kairos Palestina NL. Besides Mitri Raheb, several other important speakers were present.

Besides national conferences, we also organise regional conferences to attract attention from local church members and to raise awareness of the struggle of the Palestinian people, especially the Christians.

We consider it important to alert the members of the protestant churches to the situation of their Palestinian brothers and sisters because the protestant churches in the Netherlands have a strong feeling of connection with the state of Israel, justifying domination of the land from the perspective of ideas of election and the land promise, as well as recompense for the Holocaust.

Criticism of the government of Israel is badly accepted by the Protestant Church. Sometimes speakers are strongly criticised during regional conferences and workshops; they have to choose their words carefully. There are meetings with the church leaders to discuss the viewpoint of the Protestant Church; we critique their mistaken premises not only during meetings with them but also in letters written to them.

FOSNL works together with other groups in the Netherlands concerned with seeking justice and peace for the people in Palestine and Israel.

A few years ago Kairos Palestina NL and Friends of Sabeel NL did their best to promote the sale of wine from the Cremisan Valley; e.g., churches were asked to use the wine at the Holy Communion.

Together with some trade unions the campaign of BDS is discussed. It calls for a selective disinvestment in those companies that are making money on the Occupation in the hope of putting pressure on these companies to withdraw from their support to the Occupation.

The Cornerstone is sent to our members together with our own magazine "Uitweg" where information can be found about contact with Palestinians, reviews of books, conferences, reports of witness trips etc.

"Come and See" is the title given to the study trip to Palestine organised mainly for ministers to raise awareness of the situation of the Palestinian Christians. But, in fact, everyone who is interested can take part.

Until last year, the guide of those trips was a representative of the Protestant Church who was delegated to Jerusalem to support the work of Sabeel. Unfortunately there are no longer such representatives, but the trips are still going on. During the trip, meetings and visits are arranged with Palestinian and Jewish organisations that work for justice, peace and reconciliation.

The trip includes, e.g., a meeting with Elias Chacour, archbishop of the Greek Catholic Church who works at friendship and solidarity between Jews and Palestinians; a visit to the Mossawa Center, the Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel; a meeting with women of AEI (Arab Educational Institute) Open Windows, a Palestinian organisation that furthers education, peace building and dialogue in the Palestinian cities of Hebron and Bethlehem; a meeting with a representative of Rabbis for Human Rights and a former soldier of Breaking the Silence and, of course, a meeting with Sabeel Jerusalem. It is an extensive trip that makes people very well aware of what is going on in Israel between Jews and Palestinians and of the problems Palestinians have to cope with. After the trip the participants are supposed to tell the story of the Palestinian people/Christians in their family, environment and their own churches. That is what they also do (because of the commitment they

made) and in that way more and more people become aware of the miserable situation of the Palestinians in Israel and in the occupied zones.

Friends of Sabeel NL has their own website with messages from Palestine, information about books that are worth reading, information about conferences, the wave of prayer, translated every week by a member of the board, news from the board, accounts of trips, etc.

“Tell our stories in your own family, churches and country” is what the women of AEI Open Windows ask us during the Come and See trip.

Friends of Sabeel NL tries to answer their call by these activities so that finally justice will be done to the Palestinian people/Christians.

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SAVE THE DATES



100 Years Since the Balfour Declaration

Sabeel 10th International Conference:

March 7th – March 13th

Wave of Prayer:

One of the ways our International Friends can stay connected with Sabeel Jerusalem is through our Wave of Prayer. This prayer ministry enables local and international friends of Sabeel to pray over regional concerns on a weekly basis. Sent to Sabeel's network of supporters, the prayer is used around the world and during Sabeel's Thursday Communion service. As each community in its respective time zone lifts these concerns in prayer at noon every Thursday, this “wave of prayer” washes over the world.

Join us at prayer@sabeel.org

Friends of Sabeel Norway

As the struggle for a just peace continues in the Holy Land, Friends of Sabeel Norway aims to amplify the voice of our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters by standing up for the oppressed, working for justice, and seeking peace-building opportunities.

History and Organization

Friends of Sabeel Norway (FoSN) was established in 2001 under the umbrella of Friends of Sabeel Scandinavia, which is based in Sweden. Rev. Kjartan Ruset served as the first chair of FoSN from 2001 to 2007. Since 2007 Hans Morten Haugen has served as the chair. Haugen's previous positions were with the Church of Norway (CoN) Council on International and Ecumenical Relations and with Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), as Representative in Jerusalem. Eilert Rostrup, previous International Director of YMCA/YWCA Norway, now Director of the Karibu Foundation, was vice-chair until 2014, when he was replaced by Sven Oppegaard, a former Assistant General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation. An Executive Committee was established in 2014, which now also includes Tyler Dale Hauger of the Karibu Foundation.

In addition to the Executive Committee, FoSN operates with a Steering Group that consists of approximately ten women and men from across the country. FoSN also works to mobilize young leadership, and



Sharing breakfast, South Hebron Hills

Photo EAPPI

all but one of the approximately 10 Norwegian participants at the Sabeel Young Adult Conferences have been women. The first meeting of Young Friends of Sabeel Scandinavia took place in Southern Sweden in October 2014, with three Norwegian participants.

Advocacy work

In Norway some of the major emphases of FoSN activities have been to convene seminars and to write in the media, in order to influence and possibly change attitudes and positions of the churches. Yet, our work includes wider advocacy efforts for a just peace.

Based on calls from the Sabeel office, FoSN has addressed the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on issues such as Palestinian statehood;

detention of Palestinian children in Israeli prisons; and the OECD Tourism conference in Jerusalem. In addition FoSN has called for a renegotiation of the EFTA – Israel Free Trade Agreement – as it does not effectively prevent settlement products from entering the EFTA markets.

FoSN has also initiated and facilitated a dialogue between churches and church-related organizations on BDS issues. In November 2014 a joint letter on this topic with seven signatories including the CoN and NCA, was sent to the Norwegian Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Trade and Industry. Further, in June 2015, a letter was sent to four Norwegian importers expressing concern related to Norwegian import of settlement products.

We seek cooperation with many partners, for instance through the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, and in showing the film “The Stones Cry Out” in the presence of the producer, Yasmine Perni. We have also facilitated seminars with Ched Myers, one of the main speakers at the 2011 Sabeel Conference.

While not being a member of the Association of Norwegian NGOs for Palestine, we have responded to their calls for joint letters on certain occasions, including the ten year commemoration of the 2004 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on the Wall.

Advocacy work is also done through writing op-eds in Norwegian newspapers. FoSN has published op-eds in a wide variety of Norwegian media, including liberal, centre-right, Christian and moderately Zionist newspapers.

Theological work

Theological work is by far the most important part of FoSN work. Most of our op-eds have been on theological issues, linked to justice issues. FoSN has had the pleasure of hosting Naim Ateek in 2002 (Oslo), 2004 (Oslo and Trondheim), 2007 (Oslo), 2009 (Oslo and Kristiansand), 2010 (Trondheim and Bergen) and 2012 (Oslo, Molde, Ålesund and Volda/Ørsta/Ulsteinvik). Moreover, in 2008 Sabeel Board member Salwa Duaibis led seminars in Stavanger and Haugesund. On all these occasions there has been cooperation with the local bishops, and the support came from CoN Development Education Service.

On the first of Naim Ateek’s visits, there was an emphasis on meeting politicians and political advisors. Later, the emphasis of his visits shifted toward encounters with staff and students at theological institutions, Christian university colleges, as well as folk high schools and a Bible school.

Immediately following Naim Ateek’s Norway visit in 2012, FoSN received support from the CoN National Fund to convene regional seminars on reading of the Bible. These seminars were held in three cities (Grimstad, Trondheim and Bergen) in 2013. Presenters were Anne Sender from the Jewish community and various theology professors, as well as Hans Morten Haugen and Rev. Jens Olav Mæland. Mæland is another Sabeel friend, who has published significant books and articles on Christian Zionism. In 2014 NCA supported similar seminars, held in the city of Ålesund. At the time of these seminars, FoSN had op-eds in all the regional newspapers, co-authored by CoN bishops, deans and priests. Hence, the main message reached a wider audience.

In October 2015 a seminar was organized by the Norwegian Bishops’ Conference concerning the interpretation of biblical statements on the topic of promised land. Here, FoSN was invited to participate. While appreciating the lecture’s strong warnings against Christian Zionism, we challenged the linking, by one of the bishops, of “land” and “promises” allegedly present in the New Testament. In a subsequent interview, the bishop was clearer: “The establishment of the state of

Israel is not God’s revelation and the act of God. It is human work.” This emphasis is important.

We will continue to work with the other churches in Norway. The regional seminars mentioned above were a start, and the open meeting in Oslo in September 2014, entitled “Christian Zionism – an Obstacle for a Just Peace?” is another example. The CoN and the Christian Council of Norway were co-hosts.

Outreach

We believe that FoSN is increasingly recognized. In terms of support by individuals (those receiving Cornerstone), FoSN has grown steadily, and has been able to send money to Sabeel over the years. Still we wish for more contributors.

In autumn 2015 FoSN paid for a letter to be sent to all 1260 congregations in the Church of Norway, with the hope that church offerings could be designated to Sabeel’s work. We hope that this letter can introduce Sabeel’s important work to a wider audience, and can give Sabeel a broader outreach as we continue the work ahead.

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Friends of Sabeel Scandinavia/Sweden



Prayer service for Jerusalem

Friends of Sabeel in Scandinavia, gathering people from Denmark, Norway and Sweden, was founded in May 2001. The aim was and is to support Sabeel Jerusalem and its ecumenical work for a just peace and an end to the occupation.

We have worked independently in Norway and Sweden by: taking action, holding seminars and workshops, arranging witness visits, participating in advocacy, and attending Sabeel's International Conferences. During the first years there also was a Sabeel group in Denmark. In 2016 we are formally going to start FOSS (Friends of Sabeel Sweden) and FOSN (Friends of Sabeel Norway). In reality this is how we have worked for the last years. And, of course, people in Denmark are welcome to join us!

There are many organizations working for a free Palestine in Sweden. As FOSS is a very small organization, totally dependant on volunteers, we are dependant on cooperating with others and with different churches. With success we have arranged many public events in cooperation with other friends of a free Palestine, also

with people coming from Sabeel Jerusalem to witness.

Come and see – go and tell! This is an important method to get more people committed. We try to support people to attend the Witness Visits that Sabeel invites us to in Jerusalem. We have also given scholarships to young people, to make it possible for them to attend the youth conferences held in Jerusalem. And last year we started the network, Young Friends of Sabeel Sweden!

One of our main challenges is to make more and more people and politicians in Sweden more knowledgeable of the situation for our Christian Sisters and Brothers in Palestine – yes, for all people - and the need for a *just* peace, not only peace!

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Friends of Sabeel UK



Witness Visit – Tent of Nations

Friends of Sabeel UK was started in 1996 by Jan Davies at the invitation of Naim Ateek, Founder and Director of Sabeel.

Jan first visited Israel/Palestine in March 1982, the first of many visits, when she was working with Christian Aid. She had very little prior knowledge of the situation for Palestinians and her initial visit to the region was huge in terms of discovering the issues and difficulties experienced by the Palestinian people there. Jan became convinced of the need to tell people back at home in the UK of the situation. A poster she saw in Gaza in 1982 said:

May more eyes see
More ears hear
More lips speak

Jan's passion was, and is, to enable the sharing of the Palestinian story in the UK.

When Jan stood down as coordinator, Jennifer Oldershaw took her place and when she retired some 5 or so years later Anne Clayton became coordinator. Anne is now also stepping down but all three have been passionately committed to supporting the Palestinian Christians in their life and work for justice and peace.

Friends of Sabeel UK works with the ecumenical network of Churches in the UK and with other organisations, eg. Kairos Britain, committed to peace and justice in Israel/Palestine.

We are committed to:

- Supporting the Sabeel Theology Centre in Jerusalem in its work for the promotion of religion for the benefit of the community.
- Supporting and encouraging the Christian community in the Holy Land (Israel and the Palestinian areas of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem) in their life and witness.

- Raising awareness in the United Kingdom concerning Christians in the Holy Land and promoting links with them.

The **Main Challenges** over the past five years have been many but over the last few years we have concentrated more of our efforts on the following:

1. Targeting the Next Generation: involving and energizing young British Christians

We have been very encouraged as a Board to see the growing number of young people that have become involved in FOSUK over the last few years. While knowing that we have much yet to do, we have taken or sent a dozen young people to visit or to conferences and have raised the financial support to enable them to go and see for themselves the realities on the ground. Two interns have worked with us in the UK office for periods of time ranging from 2 to 6 months and we have had the opportunity to speak at University groups, Theological Colleges and appropriate church groups.

Perhaps the greatest encouragement is to see two of the young people who participated in Sabeel's Young Adult Conferences now on the UK Board and passionate about the issues in Palestine.

2. Informing and Educating the Churches

There have been many opportunities to speak in various places and at an increasing number of the more Evangelical Churches, sometimes with great interest and support and sometimes with opposition to what we were saying.

We have been able to offer these groups an up to date picture of the present state of Palestine/Israel realities and to present and critique the Zionist Theology that nurtures uncritical support for Israel's unjust policies.

We have also held an Engaging Evangelicals Day when we gathered around 30 leaders of churches and Christian organisations together to discuss how they could better work towards justice and peace in Israel/Palestine.

We have been especially grateful to Colin Chapman who wrote a Bible Study for us to accompany the Kairos 'Time for Action' document. Called 'Israel/Palestine, Using the Bible Today', it is a series of four studies addressing the following questions:

1. How should we use the Bible today in thinking about Israel/Palestine?
2. What is special about the land?
3. What is our vision for a just society?
4. How should we fight injustice and work for justice and peace?

To date we have sold around 200 copies.

3. Pilgrimages and Conferences: for people to hear and see for themselves the realities on the ground

A good number of our Board and members have attended Sabeel's International Conferences and more than 40 people have been involved in the three UK Witness Visits in 2012, 2014, and 2015. On average around 80 to 100 have attended our Annual Conference held each summer. We have had a variety of topics and speakers at

these conferences among whom were: Naim Ateek, Mark Braverman, Ilan Pappé, Iyad Burnat, Colin Chapman, Munther Isaac and Yohanna Katanacho.

We have also hosted Hind Khoury and Nora Carmi, Naim Ateek and Mark Braverman, Munther Isaac and Iyad Burnat on speaking tours around the UK.

4. Leadership Development

We are fortunate to have been able to send young people out to learn alongside the younger Sabeel staff in Jerusalem on the Young Adult Conferences and this has helped them come back passionate about what they have seen. Two are now on our Board and many are involved where they live and study in justice issues to do with Israel and Palestine.

In addition to all the above, we continue to have an extremely committed network of members and supporters. Many receive the weekly Wave of Prayer, using it for individual prayer, in groups and in their churches. There are a number of Regional Groups who hold their own local events to raise awareness of the Palestinian situation and the work of Sabeel. We send out a monthly e-bulletin with news from Palestine/Israel, listings of events and resources, and we produce our own Newsletter which is sent out with Sabeel's Cornerstone magazine.

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Friends of Sabeel North America

20 Years of Pilgrimage - "Come and See"

Twenty years ago a handful of American Christian pilgrims, scandalized by the injustice they had witnessed in the Holy Land, and learning of the role of the U.S. in supporting Israel's ongoing illegal military occupation of Palestinian land, were inspired to take up the Palestinian cause back home, to educate their fellow Christians and church leaders, and build a movement with the ambitious goal of changing U.S. policy in the Middle East. It was 1996, a year of Likud incitements on Haram al-Sharif, bus bombings in Jerusalem, and a Sabeel international conference with hundreds of participants, including many Americans, that concluded with the World Council of Churches International Advocacy Week.

But back home in the U.S. our Sabeel Friends were discouraged by the apathy and ignorance they found in their faith communities. Palestine was a remote reality, a place read about in history books, a name that invoked TV news of terrorists set on destroying the little country of Israel. Most American Christians did not know that Palestinian Christians even existed. It would not be an easy task to break through the fog of misinformation fed by the media and swallowed by God's people in the pews.

**"The man who never alters his opinion
is like standing water,
and breeds reptiles of the mind." ~William Blake**

But how to break through America's illusions of inviolability and triumphalism? Hats off to those first faithful, undaunted Friends of Sabeel who began planting seeds to win hearts and minds. They were like the first Christians set out to build the Kingdom of God in the midst of an unfriendly Roman Empire. Voices in the wilderness (sound familiar?). Through grassroots education in churches from 1996 to 2000, early FOSNA made great strides in bringing more awareness to the U.S. role in Israel's military occupation.

In 20 years that tiny mustard seed planted in the fertile soil of steadfast faithfulness to the demands of Gospel justice has grown into a tree where the doves of peace have perched.

**"a million birds on the branches of my heart,
are singing fighting songs." ~Mahmoud Darwish**

Twenty years is but a blip on the screen of history, but these years raised new consciousness among American Christians, thanks to hundreds of volunteers and thousands of financial supporters. Indeed, that mustard seed has gone wild, its roots going deep into the heart of things, its branches reaching up toward heaven and out to embrace the world. It is a symbol of faith and, as its name implies, it burns with a passion for justice.

**"I came to set the earth on fire,
and how I wish it were already kindled!" Luke 12:49**

FOSNA is now well-positioned to coordinate major national campaigns such as **No Child Behind Bars/Drop G4S**. G4S (Group 4 Securior), the world's largest private security company, is complicit in violations of international law. G4S profits from the detainment and abuse of Palestinian children. This is in direct contravention to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The systematic attack on children and their parents, in Gaza and the West Bank, traumatizes an entire generation in an attempt to limit Palestinian self-determination.

FOSNA is leading the No Child Behind Bars/Drop G4S campaign to identify and expose G4S. Our **Municipal Divestment Organizing Guide** helps local groups identify contract renewal dates, map local power structures, form coalitions, and win. The momentum is building on this campaign, and we are excited to see local "Drop G4S" campaigns sprouting up all over the United States. Learn more on our website: <http://fosna.org/howtostopg4s>.

**"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you,
then they fight you, then you win." ~Mahatma Gandhi**

We are confident in our foundation, our anchor, our rock, who is Christ the Liberator. We will carry on with this work of Sabeel, undaunted by a world spinning increasingly toward violence. We believe the Kingdom of God is at hand, ours to discover, to nurture and release into the world. In prayer and in solidarity with our Palestinian friends, with the Peace of Christ, the Salaam of Christ, we will be called back to life.

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PURPOSE STATEMENT *f* SABEEL

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love.

Sabeel strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, nonviolence, liberation and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word “Sabeel” is Arabic for ‘the way’ and also a ‘channel’ or ‘spring’ of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

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