

# A Statement from the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre

East Jerusalem, Palestine - October 2023

**Terrible violence continues between Israeli forces and armed Palestinian resistance groups, resulting in thousands of dead and injured on each side, including scores of civilian men, women, and children. This devastating escalation comes in the wake of a surprise attack on Israel by Hamas, with Israeli leadership threatening long-term violence and destruction.**

At Sabeel, we envision a future where every life holds intrinsic value, and every individual enjoys freedom and safety, irrespective of their background or identity. Sabeel condemns and mourns the tragic loss of all life and human suffering. We categorically reject all forms of violence. And, we recognize that the only way forward for us is non-violence.

It has been 75 years since the Nakba, 57 years of brutal military occupation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and 16 years since the suffocating military blockade of Gaza began. In light of this seemingly endless march of dispossession and death, armed Palestinian resistance groups initiated an unprecedented assault, including the tragic massacre of Israeli civilians. Responding, the Israeli government has engaged in airstrikes, indiscriminate bombing campaigns, and responsive actions that amount to war crimes—accompanied by genocidal rhetoric—against the civilian population in Gaza. Recent events have witnessed the tragic deaths and injuries of numerous Israelis and Palestinians, along with the abduction of civilians.

As we experience and attentively keep track of events as they unfold, it is pivotal to remember:

- Palestinians have been under attack, suffering dispossession and dehumanization from Zionism, for over 75 years.
- The continuation of Israel's policies related to displacement, apartheid, and occupation has been facilitated by the backing of several dominant global powers, notably the U.S., which remains deeply involved in this conflict.
- In the past year, an extreme shift to the far-right in the Israeli government has seen an intensified and ruthless military occupation. The Palestinian people face violent expulsions, house demolitions, mass killings, sieges, and daily indignities.
- There are recurring, oftentimes violent, incidents where Jewish extremists and Israeli forces disrupt the right to freedom of worship, storming the Muslim Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, attempting to lay claim to the site, and intimidating peaceful devotees.

- The Israeli authorities have imposed exceptional restrictions on Palestinian Christians and churches, particularly during their religious festivities. Attacks by radical Jewish groups on Palestinian Christian communities and properties persist, with little to no action in response from the Israeli authorities.
- Over the years, the people of Gaza have felt the chokehold of a strict Israeli blockade by air, sea, and land, effectively trapping over two million individuals and depriving them of fundamental human rights. In recent days, Israel has prohibited all food, fuel, electricity, or water from entering Gaza.
- Palestinian prisoners, including children, are routinely assaulted, bound, blindfolded, and dragged from their residences in the early hours by Israeli occupation forces, often detained without formal charges or trial in military prisons for months or years. Peaceful protests against these policies, even in the form of hunger strikes, are met with harsh repercussions.
- Many Palestinian residences across various villages and towns are either set ablaze by Israeli settlers or demolished by military operations.
- Whole Palestinian communities have been forced to vacate their ancestral homes and lands, at times to facilitate Israeli military drills.

**For 75 years, Israeli policies have revolved around displacement, military occupation, and the maintenance of an apartheid regime. The suffering over these years is significantly tied to the role of the international community in this turmoil, most especially the United States alongside global powers like the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and others. By consistently supporting Israel, the U.S. and other powers indirectly further the ongoing violence. The unchecked military aid, diplomatic shielding, and enormous financial support from the U.S. play a part in bolstering Israel's existing policies. Unwavering backing for the Israeli military only perpetuates the cycle of violence.**

In light of these challenges, we, the undersigned, pledge our commitment to nonviolence, influenced by the following convictions:

- The might of the Israeli Army and its affiliates is unparalleled; violence will not bring victory.
- Nonviolence is a potent force. It enables collective participation from Palestinians, Israelis, and the international community. The path of nonviolence is the most impactful.
- Our ultimate struggle is not against individuals; it is against evil. Violence harms individuals, but our true adversary is the inherent evil of occupation and racist ideologies, which can be vanquished with good, for God is the embodiment of goodness.
- We champion nonviolence because it resonates with the divine principles set by the Creator. As rain is impartial, showering both the oppressed and oppressors, we uphold God's ways.

To all those who believe in and exercise violence, we want to say:

1. Reject violence; it's not the solution. Don't be governed by wrath or vengeance.
2. To those still gripping their weapons, we beg you to adhere to the principles of the Geneva Conventions and the laws of armed conflict. Upholding the sanctity of civilian lives is a shared tenet across religions and human morality. Let all combatants refrain from the wanton destruction of human life and adhere, at the very minimum, to the principles of distinction, proportionality, military necessity, fair treatment of prisoners, and no *means malum en se* (inherently evil methods).
3. We do acknowledge those who have chosen to observe international humanitarian law even in the midst of so much devastation.

We extend an invitation to our friends, partners, and everyone devoted to justice, peace, and reconciliation to support our nonviolent mission. The longstanding policies of displacement, military occupation, and apartheid by the Israeli government must be dismantled, but not at the cost of our values and humanity. The elimination of the other is not a viable option. Stand with us in our nonviolent endeavors.

**The international community must understand that lasting peace and the cessation of violence are intertwined with the pursuit of genuine justice based on international law. Palestinians call for a fair resolution to the injustice of the Nakba, an end to the 1967 military occupation, and an end to the apartheid system. The tenacity and spirit of the Palestinian people stand unwavering, with *sumud* ("steadfast perseverance") consistently evident. The nonviolent majority of Palestinians, along with our Israeli and international friends, should continue to harness creativity and courage as their primary tools, and it is imperative for all who seek liberation, justice, and peace in Palestine and Israel to uplift and support each other.**