

Christian women and the Occupation of Palestine

Leigh Arnold, Communications Manager, Anglicord. Anglican Overseas Aid

An international gathering of influential Christian women has called for non-violent resistance to end Israel's 'inhuman' occupation of Palestine.

The female theologians, church leaders, development professionals and activists made the call during a meeting in Bethlehem to mark the first anniversary of the launch of the historic Kairos Palestine Document (KPD).

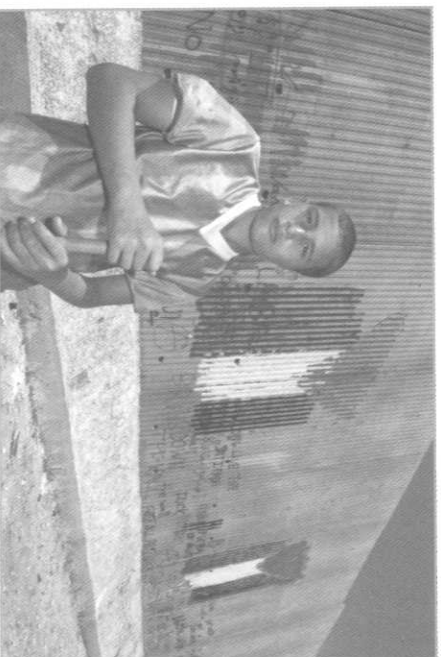
The Kairos Palestine Document was produced by Palestinian Theologians and activists and endorsed by the heads of various Palestinian Christian Churches – including the Anglican Church – in December 2009 to appeal for an end to the occupation.

The thirty women who gathered in Bethlehem from 13-18 December, 2010, said the KPD demonstrated unity among Palestinian Christians 'in the common struggle against occupation'.

'Kairos, the moment of truth, arises from a deadlock of peace negotiations and as a marker of the futility of military solutions,' the women agreed in an official statement. 'The reality has been about 'peace talking'. Now is the time for 'peace making'. The KPD affirms creative non-violent resistance as a way for the end to occupation. It identifies boycott as one of the possible forms of such resistance. Whether the solution is one state or two, the occupation must end.' The boycott refers to products exported from the illegal settlements on Palestinian land.

The Bethlehem gathering insisted there was a particular need 'for the global ecumenical community of women to listen to, strengthen and support the work of Palestinian women'.

'Women hold together and sustain their community. Women have been ecumenically involved in the work of resistance throughout the Israeli occupation,' the official



A Palestinian boy stands in front of the Separation Wall at the West Bank. Photo Paul Jeffrey

statement read.

During the Bethlehem gathering, participants visited Israeli checkpoints and the so-called 'Separation Wall' built by Israel around - and inside - the Palestinian West Bank. 'We will never forget the concrete humiliation and suffering that we witnessed at the Bethlehem checkpoint and at the Separation Wall on the way to Jerusalem,' the women said. 'Though we only experienced this on a single day, we cannot forget that this is a daily reality in the lives of all Palestinians.'

Misha Coleman, CEO of Australian Anglican aid and development agency Anglicord, told the gathering that Kairos was important because it had been 'written by Palestinians in Palestine'. 'Kairos offers a way to engage and motivate clergy and politicians in Australia around the issue of Palestine. And it is particularly appealing to Christians,' Ms Coleman said.

Reflecting on the plight of the Palestinians, World Council of Churches (WCC) European President Dame Dr Mary Tanner said: 'We pledge ourselves to pray for you, knowing that in Christ no wall, however high, however obscene, can separate us in the communion of God's own life of love. What happens to you happens to us, your pain is our pain, and your struggle becomes our struggle.'

'We will accompany you in that movement which the Kairos Palestine Document has begun and bring it, in whatever ways we can, into our ministries, into our churches and societies. Your story will be our story and we will ask the fellowship of churches in the WCC that has gathered us to take your witness and your challenges into its work and into the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in May 2011. We shall not be silent.'

The Bethlehem gathering was attended by women from the Middle East, Australia, Africa, Asia, North and Latin America and Europe and was sponsored by the WCC office on Women in Church and Society and by the Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum.



Two girls at Al'Arrub refugee camp in the South West Bank - Photo, Paul Jeffrey