



A young Palestinian up against the Separation Wall. Photo: Paul Jeffries, Anglicord

Christian women and the occupation of Palestine

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

The *Kairos Palestine Document* was produced by Palestinian theologians

and activists, and endorsed by the heads of Palestinian churches – including the Anglican Church – in December 2009, to appeal for an end to the 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 document thus 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 illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.)

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, *Anglicord* CEO, 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," Ms Coleman said. "It is particularly appealing to Christians."

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 the *Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum*. □

Leigh Arnold
Communications Manager,
Anglicord: Anglican Overseas Aid

What it means to be a Christian woman in some countries with Christian minorities

The European Parliament was recently presented with a written declaration on religious freedom, notes the Barnabas Fund, a Christian organization which supports persecuted Christians around the world. The declaration states that 75% of deaths linked to religion-based hate crimes affect Christians, making them the world's most persecuted religious group.

One of the most disturbing aspects of religion-based crimes is the treatment of women and girls in some Islamic societies. In such cultures, Muslims are superior to non-Muslims, and men are superior to women. In this context, Christian women and girls are victimised and vulnerable. For example, violent assaults by Muslim men in Pakistan and Egypt are common, and mostly go unreported.

There is strong evidence that girls are kidnapped, beaten, raped, and forced

to recite the Muslim creed (thus, in Muslim opinion, converting to Islam). They are then forced to marry Muslim men. Governments, local authorities and police often turn a blind eye to this kind of event, so that there is no redress.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12: 26: "If one member [of the body] suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it."

If we consider that we and these women are all part of the body of Christ, how is it that we ignore the sufferings of these members? Is it because they are not Australian? Or are women? Or we don't really believe that Christ died for them?

Isn't it time that Christians in the West (such as ourselves), who enjoy freedom and security, take up the cause of this despised minority?

So what can we do as Christians?

- Support a group which monitors the situation and assists in countries where persecution takes place;
- Pray for the churches in the countries affected;
- Become a letter-writer for *Amnesty International* on behalf of persecuted Christian women in particular;
- Write to MPs and Senators to get the Australian government to act at an official level in bringing the matter before the governments concerned. □

Heather and Brian Stanmore
Parish of South East Bendigo



Anglican Diocese of
BENDIGO

The Diocese of Bendigo expects the highest standards of professional service from its Clergy and Lay Ministers.

IF YOU HAVE A COMPLAINT

Please call (free) **1800 135 246**

A phone call to the above number will mean that your complaint will be handled by the Director of Professional Standards.

The Diocese is a full participant in the Victorian Anglican Provincial Abuse and Harassment Protocol.

This is an independent, objective procedure adopted by the Diocese of Bendigo.