

## **United Nations General Assembly**

### **Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People**

#### **Solemn Commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.**

Trusteeship Council Chamber  
United Nations  
New York

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Statement by Rev. Chris Ferguson,  
Representative to the UN,  
The World Council of Churches.

“On behalf of the international community of civil society”

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Secretary General, Mr. President of the General Assembly, Mr. President of the Security Council, Excellencies:

Let me begin with a deep expression of appreciation to the Committee of the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for extending an invitation to civil society representatives to participate in this solemn commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Not only has the Committee under the leadership of its Chairman Ambassador Paul Badji and other Committee members worked tirelessly to keep the Occupation and the situation of the Palestinian People before the International Community, they have done so forging a strong partnership with NGOs and International Civil Society. These efforts to keep diplomatic and political attention focus on the Palestinian People and their rights has never been more urgently needed nor more difficult than in this 40<sup>th</sup> year of the Occupation and the 60<sup>th</sup> year marking the Resolution on the UN Partition plan and, the 59<sup>th</sup> year since the Nakba.

It is both a great privilege and an impossible task for me to adequately “represent” international civil society. Those around the world including Palestinian and Israeli NGOs and civil society groups who work in solidarity with the Palestinian People to end the illegal occupation and to achieve a just

peace for all parties to the conflict are many and varied. There are movements, networks and groups in every continent in a growing and expanding mobilization of solidarity, support and determined non-violent action to end the occupation, protect the civilian population, and insist on the implementation of UN resolutions and international law through non-military solutions. Civil Society and NGO actions not only span the world's regions we come from many sectors of society. Among the wide variety of groups visibly working for a comprehensive and just peace is the constant and growing action of the Churches and other faith based organizations.

This year of painfully significant dates is marked by great urgency in the face of the deepening suffering of the people in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the refugees in the region and throughout the world.

The attention of the world was drawn to Annapolis. That meeting heralded a re-activation of a peace process. The WCC General Secretary Dr. Sam Kobia sent a letter to the US Secretary of State and to Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas laying out our view of the success and relevance of any actions taken. Post Annapolis the comments are of even greater relevance: and I quote...

*"As this initiative is set to begin we would like to suggest three criteria for success based on 60 years of international church advocacy for peace in this conflict.*

*Good faith negotiations are the first criterion. The crux of the problem -- the final status issues -- will not yield without sustained and robust good faith negotiations by all sides. Experience has shown that the tactic of avoiding, delaying or diluting final status issues has lost all utility and credibility in peace initiatives to address this conflict.*

*Second, negotiations must recognize and involve those parties with legitimate interests at stake in the solution to the conflict. From the earliest possible juncture, peace negotiations must include their representatives in a meaningful and appropriate manner. The participation in Annapolis, now confirmed, of some states in the Arab Peace Initiative is an essential opening in this direction. The process you launch this week must be genuinely multilateral in order to advance the cause of peace.*

*Third, scrupulous adherence to the international rule of law is essential. Any agreement or process that you entertain will be judged against United Nations Security Council Resolutions and the treaty obligations of the parties involved, international human rights law and international humanitarian law.*

*These legal standards are the foundations of peace, as the international community has affirmed again and again through the United Nations and through international organizations of civil society including the World Council of Churches. Similarly, the specific United Nations Security Council resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are the architecture of peace. These include UNSCR 242, 338, 1397 and 1515, and UN General Assembly Resolution 194 on the question of Jerusalem and refugees.*

*Also, during negotiations, the negotiating parties' behavior in Israel and the Occupied Territories must be governed by the same body of international law. Early action on ending the isolation of Gaza and the collective punishment of its 1.5 million residents, stopping attacks on civilians of either side, releasing prisoners denied due process on both sides, freezing all settlement growth of any kind, ceasing land expropriation, stopping work on the separation barrier, opening negotiations about the Occupied Golan Heights, and other well-known steps will empower the Annapolis process if implemented and will hobble and weaken it if not implemented. Such steps will also signal the level of good faith behind the Annapolis process -- making reconciliation between the main Palestinian political groups, Fatah and Hamas, eminently more feasible.*

*We would submit that negotiations based on good faith, on multilateral participation and on the rule of law will require the US administration not only to convene, but also to ensure that the final agreement preserves the indivisibility of justice for Palestinians and Israelis.*

*It is critical to respond to the reality that negotiations with similar intentions in the past have been counter-productive,*

*allowing the occupation to continue and intensify. Among the causes were the repeated failures to address core issues and to see those issues through in good faith to an equitable resolution. To meet and fail in the same manner yet again is, we believe, deeply and dangerously irresponsible at this point in the history of the conflict. ”*

End quote...

And yet as we speak the International Community remains woefully inactive and complicity silent in the face of the dramatically deteriorating situation in Gaza. There is some evident but insufficient attention paid to the desperate humanitarian crisis but no will or moral courage to address the gross and flagrant violation of international law and breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention by Israel in declaring Gaza an enemy entity and inflicting unconscionable collective punishment on 1.5 million people. The International Community can not and should not abandon the civilian population of Gaza and leave them without the protection they are guaranteed. Neither Palestinian internal conflicts nor “terrorizing” Qassam rocket attacks justify denying food, fuel, economic livelihood, medical care, freedom to travel and study not to mention the threat to cut off electricity to 1.5 million innocent civilians. Church related hospitals and clinics break our hearts daily with the reports of ill and injured children and patients dying because they cannot travel for medical treatment or supplies are not available. 80% of the people live in poverty and 1.1 million survive on food hand-outs. This is an intentional and utterly illegal “starvation diet” designed to punish and pressure the population – supposedly to end rocket activity for which they are not responsible and cannot control. In large part the situation in Gaza is the further expression of the International Community boycotting and isolating Palestinians for the exercise of their democratic rights. The blind eye turned to the rights of civilians in Gaza to protection makes a mockery of all other UN pretensions to care for unarmed and defenseless civilians.

Peace must be built on rights for all and protection for all. The International community has failed and continues to fail to stand with the Palestinian people in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem and world wide in ending the brutal military occupation, ongoing dispossession and securing the right to return. Crucially, this failure also impedes the peace, justice, security and rights that we seek and uphold for Israelis. This failure

is an obstacle to regional peace and impacts on world insecurity and disorder.

We speak of a just peace based on full and scrupulous implementation of international law because we know that any lasting solution for the Palestinian people is intertwined with Peace and Justice for Israel. We actively seek the wellbeing of both peoples. We insist that both the Palestinian People and Israel have legitimate security concerns. We see that although religion is not at the root of the conflict, religion has become part of the problem and, therefore religious leaders and inter-religious cooperation have to be part of the solution so that Christians, Muslims and Jews will again understand one another and live together as neighbors as they have in the past.

Knowing that there is no military solution this memory filled year has marked a re-invigoration of strong calls by international civil society to redouble efforts for non-violent actions.

Notably **The International Coordinating Network on Palestine** meeting in Brussels in August of this year launched a strong and resolute plan of action under the title: 60 years is enough! End the dispossession; bring the refugees home! The **Call to Action** included a commitment to strengthen the global campaign for boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) emphasizing that this campaign responds to a call from Palestinian civil society and is in the words of the Call to action” a non-violent effort against Israeli occupation, Apartheid and oppression.” The Network has further committed themselves to a campaign identifying and opposing Israeli policies as violations of the International Covenant Against the Crime of Apartheid.

In June of this year the **World Council of Churches** convened an International Peace Conference of Churches from around the world in Amman, Jordan. The **Amman Call** which emerged from that meeting is not meant to be another statement but simply the visible sign of a renewed commitment to “church advocacy for peace, aimed at ending the illegal occupation in accordance with UN resolutions and demonstrate its commitment to inter-religious action for peace and justice that serves all the peoples of the region.”

The meeting launched a new initiative: The Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum, dedicated to church action for both Peace Making and Peace

Building. In their own way churches around the world are increasingly looking to non-violent methods like Morally Responsible Investment which use economic measures to end the occupation. This initiative will form strong inter religious alliances to break new ground and commit ourselves to what the Amman call named as **Costly Solidarity**. Civil Society in general and the Churches in particular are showing new vigor faced with the morally repugnant and unjustifiable situation. Costly Solidarity means taking non-violent, constructive actions which will cause discomfort, tensions and serious disagreements. Such solidarity is an ethical imperative.

We are committed to undertaking committed actions in solidarity and to holding the International Community accountable to the norms and standards of International law for all. The Palestinian Rights can no longer be “exceptions to the rule” of International law.

Civil society in our various forms and for a have called on ourselves to re-commit to active campaigns for rights and freedoms. We have called and continue to call on the international community to embrace the principles of International law and the relevant UN resolutions and vigorously apply them. Churches have based their actions on respect for the Un Resolutions and the rule of law .There is an ethical and spiritual imperative to use laws and non-violent means to achieve peace and justice. The call is simple: Join us in costly solidarity. It is not easy. Nor should it be... but the dispossessed and oppressed Palestinian people deserve no less. All the peoples involved and affected by the conflict deserve no less. A just peace for Palestine and Israel demands it.

Thank you.