

Special Report 67, Israel Under Attack

[A Call for Repentance: An Open Letter from Palestinian](#)

[Christians to Western Church Leaders and Theologians](#)

(Provided by a brother in Christ, to whom my response below is addressed)

“Learn to do right; seek justice; defend the oppressed” (Isa 1:17). We, at the undersigned Palestinian Christian institutions and grassroots movements, grieve and lament the renewed cycle of violence in our land. As we were about to publish this open letter, some of us lost dear friends and family members in the atrocious Israeli bombardment of innocent civilians on October 19, 2023, Christians included, who were taking refuge in the historical Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Porphyrius in Gaza. Words fail to express our shock and horror with regard to the on-going war in our land. We deeply mourn the death and suffering of all people because it is our firm conviction that all humans are made in God’s image. We are also profoundly troubled when the name of God is invoked to promote violence and religious national ideologies.

Further, we watch with horror the way many western Christians are offering unwavering support to Israel’s war against the people of Palestine. While we recognize the numerous voices that have spoken and continue to speak for the cause of truth and justice in our land, we write to challenge western theologians and church leaders who have voiced uncritical support for Israel and to call them to repent and change. Sadly, the actions and double standards of some Christian leaders have gravely hurt their Christian witness and have severely distorted their moral judgment with regards to the situation in our land.

We come alongside fellow Christians in condemning all attacks on civilians, especially defenseless families and children. Yet, we are disturbed by the silence of many church leaders and theologians when it is Palestinian civilians who are killed. We are also horrified by the refusal of some western Christians to condemn the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine, and, in some instances, their justification of and support for the occupation. Further, we are appalled by how some Christians have legitimized Israel’s ongoing indiscriminate attacks on Gaza, which have, so far, claimed the lives of more than 3,700 Palestinians, the majority of whom are women and children. These attacks have resulted in the wholesale destruction of entire neighborhoods and the forced displacement of over one million Palestinians. The Israeli military has utilized tactics that target civilians such as the use of white phosphorus, the cutting off of water, fuel, and electricity, and the bombardment of schools, hospitals, and places of worship—including the heinous massacre at Al-Ahli Anglican-Baptist Hospital and the bombardment of the

Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Porphyrius which wiped out entire Palestinian Christian families.

Moreover, we categorically reject the myopic and distorted Christian responses that ignore the wider context and the root causes of this war: Israel's systemic oppression of the Palestinians over the last 75 years since the Nakba, the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestine, and the oppressive and racist military occupation that constitutes the crime of apartheid. This is precisely the horrific context of oppression that many western Christian theologians and leaders have persistently ignored, and even worse, have occasionally legitimized using a wide range of Zionist theologies and interpretations. Moreover, Israel's cruel blockade of Gaza for the last 17 years has turned the 365-square-kilometer Strip into an open-air prison for more than two million Palestinians—70% of whom belong to families displaced during the Nakba—who are denied their basic human rights. The brutal and hopeless living conditions in Gaza under Israel's iron fist have regrettably emboldened extreme voices of some Palestinian groups to resort to militancy and violence as a response to oppression and despair.

Sadly, Palestinian non-violent resistance, which we remain wholeheartedly committed to, is met with rejection, with some western Christian leaders even prohibiting the discussion of Israeli apartheid as reported by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and B'Tselem, and as long asserted by both Palestinians and South Africans.

Time and again, we are reminded that western attitudes towards Palestine-Israel suffer from a glaring double standard that humanizes Israeli Jews while insisting on dehumanizing Palestinians and whitewashing their suffering. This is evident in general attitudes towards the recent Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip that killed thousands of Palestinians, the apathy towards the murder of the Palestinian-American Christian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in 2022, and the killing of more than 300 Palestinians including 38 children in the West Bank this year before this recent escalation.

It seems to us that this double standard reflects an entrenched colonial discourse that has weaponized the Bible to justify the ethnic cleansing of indigenous peoples in the Americas, Oceania, and elsewhere, the slavery of Africans and the transatlantic slave trade, and decades of apartheid in South Africa. Colonial theologies are not passé; they continue in wide-ranging Zionist theologies and interpretations that have legitimized the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the vilification and dehumanization of Palestinians—Christians included—living under systemic settler-colonial apartheid. Further, we are aware of the western Christian legacy of Just War Theory that was used to justify dropping atomic bombs over innocent civilians in Japan during World War II, the destruction of Iraq and the decimation of its Christian population during the latest American war on Iraq, as well as the unwavering and uncritical support for Israel against the Palestinians in the name of moral-supremacy and “self-defense.”

Regrettably, many western Christians across wide denominational and theological spectra adopt Zionist theologies and interpretations that justify war, making them complicit in Israel's violence and oppression. Some are also complicit in the rise of the anti-Palestinian hate speech, which we are witnessing in numerous western countries and media outlets today.

Although many Christians in the West do not have a problem with the theological legitimization of war, the vast majority of Palestinian Christians do not condone violence—not even by the powerless and occupied. Instead, Palestinian Christians are fully committed to the way of Jesus in creative nonviolent resistance (Kairos Palestine, §4.2.3), which uses “the logic of love and draw[s] on all energies to make peace” (§4.2.5). Crucially, we reject all theologies and interpretations that legitimize the wars of the powerful. We strongly urge western Christians to come alongside us in this. We also remind ourselves and fellow Christians that God is the God of the downtrodden and the oppressed, and that Jesus rebuked the powerful and lifted up the marginalized. This is at the heart of God's conception of justice. Therefore, we are deeply troubled by the failure of some western Christian leaders and theologians to acknowledge the biblical tradition of justice and mercy, as first proclaimed by Moses (Deut 10:18; 16:18–20; 32:4) and the prophets (Isa 1:17; 61:8; Mic 2:1–3, 6:8; Amos 5:10–24), and as exemplified and embodied in Christ (Matt 25:34–46; Luke 1:51–53; 4:16–21).

Finally, and we say it with a broken heart, we hold western church leaders and theologians who rally behind Israel's wars accountable for their theological and political complicity in the Israeli crimes against the Palestinians, which have been committed over the last 75 years. We call upon them to reexamine their positions and to change their direction, remembering that God “will judge the world in justice” (Acts 17:31). We also remind ourselves and our Palestinian people that *otiniyan* and *ur sumud* (“steadfastness”) is anchored in our just cause and our historical rootedness in this land. As Palestinian Christians, we also continue to find our courage and consolation in the God who dwells with those of a contrite and humble spirit (Isa 57:15). We find courage in the solidarity we receive from the crucified Christ, and we find hope in the empty tomb. We are also encouraged and empowered by the costly solidarity and support of many churches and grassroots faith movements around the world, challenging the dominance of ideologies of power and supremacy. We refuse to give in, even when our siblings abandon us. We are steadfast in our hope, resilient in our witness, and continue to be committed to the Gospel of faith, hope, and love, in the face of tyranny and darkness. “In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God's goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here ‘a new land’ and ‘a new human being’, capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters” (Kairos Palestine, §10).

Your Kingdom come!

My response follows on the next page.

A Frank Response to the “Call for Repentance” from our Palestinian Brethren

Dear Munther,

I am grateful to you for this opportunity to converse and for your sharing the “Call for Repentance” issued by our Palestinian brethren, as I am to Professor Sam Logan for the opportunity to respond. I am more than open to further conversation with you and with any of the brethren. The more we hear one another out, the more we will be able to understand each other and appropriately address the awful situation in which our two nations find themselves.

The pain expressed by my Palestinian brethren in their Call for Repentance is obvious. I hope mine and that of my people will also find expression in what follows, but not to the extent that it drives me to distort the facts or misinterpret them. With you and with the brethren, I long for the day when there will be no sorrow and no pain, when God will wipe away all tears.

Before saying anything more, I want to express my sorrow and deepest sympathy for the civilians now suffering in Gaza. Such pain should not be the lot of anyone. I long and pray for their suffering to end. I further want to express my opposition to my present Government’s policies *visa vie* the conflict between our nations. I oppose Israeli settlement in the West Bank and decry the violence practiced by radicals among Israel settlers against Palestinian civilians, as well as my present Government’s all-too-slow reaction to it.

I believe the only acceptable resolution of the conflict between our people is one in which both have a State of their own; neither threaten the other, and both cooperate for their mutual welfare. I heartily agree with the Call for Repentance when it says, “words fail to express our shock and horror with regard to the on-going war in our land. We deeply mourn the death and suffering of all people because it is our firm conviction that all humans are made in God’s image. We are also profoundly troubled when the name of God is invoked to promote violence and religious national ideologies.” Amen!

I began reading the Call for Repentance, in hope it would be the kind of morally courageous statement both of our people need to hear. If it were, I would have gladly added my signature to it. Instead, it turned out to be one-sided and morally weak. Inadvertently, I’m sure, it encourages the very kind of violence it purports to condemn.

I understand my Palestinian brethren are between a rock and a hard place. They are a minuscule minority of Evangelicals in a larger minority of Christians in the midst of a Palestinian Muslim majority. They naturally and justifiably identify with their people’s longing for a State of their own while being personally (although not publicly) averse to the violence many of their fellow Palestinians employ in the struggle to achieve such a State. Israeli Jewish Christians are in a similar situation and, to my regret, largely respond to the situation in a similar way. Both communities seem to lack the courage of a truly biblical commitment to justice, peace and

fairness. I wish it were otherwise. Had we the courage to engage in a daring prophetic discourse with our two nations, we would call both to repent. The Call for Repentance implores Israel and the Christian world to repent but somehow excuses the Palestinians from such a duty.

The Call for Repentance opens with mention of “the atrocious Israeli bombardment of innocent civilians on October 19, 2023, Christians included, who were taking refuge in the historical Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Porphyrius in Gaza”. It ignores the fact that civilians in the area were urged by the Israeli forces to leave combat zones and given ample time to do so. It further ignores the fact that, while conducting its war against Hamas, the Israeli military has done everything imaginable to avoid civilian casualties — more than any military at any time anywhere, to the extent of messaging individual civilians in Gaza, calling on them to leave areas in which combat operations are being held. It also ignores the fact that Hamas, on the other hand, uses the Palestinian people as human shields. It embedded itself among civilians, sought to dissuade civilians from leaving combat areas and shot at those who choose to leave. Israeli forces had to defend them.

Israeli attacks in Gaza have been anything but “indiscriminate”, whereas Hamas’ use— contrary to international law — of facilities such as houses of worship, hospitals and schools for military purposes necessitate and clearly justify — according to international law — Israel’s attacks. Surely you would agree that to speak of “moral judgment with regards to the situation in our land” while ignoring these facts is evidence of an embarrassing measure of impaired moral judgement.

There is in the Call for Repentance not a whisper of condemnation of Hamas’ barbarity on October 7, when its hordes attacked innocent Israeli civilians, many of whom befriended and employed Gaza civilians, labored to promote peace between our two peoples and vocally supported the Palestinians’ demand for a State of their own. The vague condemnation of “all attacks on civilians, especially defenseless families and children”, especially following accusations labeled against Israel in the Call is a case of double-speak and of moral cowardice.

The Call for Repentance chooses to describe Israel’s reaction to Hamas’ atrocities in terms of “Israel’s war against the people of Palestine”. Nothing could be further from the truth. Israel’s war is decidedly not “against the people of Palestine” but against a vicious terror organization that imposed itself on the people of Gaza, suppressed all political opposition and stole many hundreds of millions of dollars meant for the benefit of the people in Gaza. Rather than using those millions for the creation of an economy that could sustain the growing population, the construction of schools and other needed institutions, it used them to construct attack tunnels and the manufacture of rockets and other weaponry used to attack Israel. It then used hospitals, kindergartens, schools, playgrounds — mostly UNWRA facilities — for military purposes, establishing in them munitions and weaponry dumps, as well as in private homes and apartment buildings. I assume you are not unaware of these practices.

If anything ought to be considered an example of “myopic and distorted Christian responses that ignore the wider context and the root causes of this war”, it is the very Call for Repentance

to which I here respond. While I decry the policies of Israel's present Government and pray for its downfall, in the course of the last 20 years Israel made repeated offers that would accord the Palestinian a State of their own. Each was turned down, first by Yasser Arafat (who publicly disavowed violence, only to engaged in it) and then by President Mahmoud Abbas (who denies the murder of six million Jews during the Holocaust and pays the salaries of those engaged in terrorism against Israel). Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Palestinians are gainfully employed in Israel, thousands have been educated in Israel and thousands more (including senior leaders of Hamas and their relatives) have been treated in Israeli hospitals.

Contrary to the claim made in the Call for Repentance claim, between the years 1948-1967 one could hardly accuse Israel of "systemic oppression of the Palestinians", let alone speak of such "oppression" as lasting for "over the last 75 years". Until 1967, the Palestinian people could not have been oppressed by Israel. They were oppressed by the Arab countries who took control of the West Bank and Gaza, intended to be a major part of the territory set aside for the Palestinian State-to-be. In other words, Arab nations — Jordan and Egypt — refused to allow the Palestinians the political independence they professed to protect. Instead, the Palestinians were governed by military governors commissioned by Jordan and Egypt, forbidden to settle outside the refugee camps and to develop an educational system or a viable industry.

By way of contrast, as of 1967 when Israel took control of the West Bank and Gaza, it enabled Palestinians to leave the camps, the establishment of colleges and universities and abetted the development both of an industry and independent political life. Before Palestinians undertook a persistent terror campaign in Israel, many thousands of them worked in Israel. This hardly qualifies for the designations of "ongoing ... oppressive and racist military occupation" or conduct "that constitutes the crime of apartheid." The use of such terms, calculated to arouse moral indignity, is unworthy of my Christian brethren.

Speaking of "context", how about this context: Israel evacuated the Gaza Strip 17 years ago and has since provided its population with water, electricity and gainful employment. Hamas took over the Strip, throwing Palestinian Authorities officials off rooftops and kneecapping others. Then, instead of devoting itself to improving the welfare of the people they subjected, Hamas utilized the means taken from the Palestinian people to manufacture means with which to attack Israel. It fired rockets at Israeli villages and cities, attacked Israeli civilians and created a "context" in which, to defend its citizens, Israel was forced to blockade the Gaza Strip. Hamas is solely to blame for the denial of Gaza civilians' "basic human rights". "The brutal and hopeless living conditions in Gaza" spoken of in the Call for Repentance were all of Hamas' doing. Surely, these facts, too, should be considered as aspects of the context. Would you not agree?

Even if Israel was, in fact, guilty of oppressing the Palestinian people, do you believe such a "context" justifies the barbarism of Hamas' conduct on October 7? Do you believe it justifies the gang-rape of women, the murder of babies in their cots, the mutilation of bodies, the abduction of civilians and their consequent torture? Hamas' treatment of Israeli civilians who long labored for the welfare of Palestinians living in Gaza is worthy of a description that far exceeds the terms "militancy and violence" unfairly attributed to Israel by the Call for Repentance. Clearly, Hamas'

actions were war crimes. The Call for Repentance is therefore a classic case of “a glaring double standard dehumanizing [Israeli Jews] ... and whitewashing their suffering”. When the Call states that “the majority” of Palestinians “oppose violence” it is being less than truthful. An independent poll held on November 20 indicates 75% of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza support Hamas’ actions on October 7.

Dog whistles such as the following comparisons are an embarrassing distortion of facts: “the ethnic cleansing of indigenous peoples in the Americas, Oceania, and elsewhere, the slavery of Africans and the transatlantic slave trade, and decades of apartheid in South Africa. Colonial theologies are not passé; they continue in wide-ranging Zionist theologies and interpretations that have legitimized the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the vilification and dehumanization of Palestinians—Christians included—living under systemic settler-colonial apartheid”.

Brother, you and I know it is not altogether true to say, as does the Call for Repentance, that “Palestinian non-violent resistance ... is met with (presumably, Israeli) rejection”. The reality is the exact opposite: while it is true Governments under Netanyahu disavowed the Palestinian right to political independence, Governments under Prime Ministers Rabin, Barak and Olmert recognized such a right and offered various resolutions of the conflict between our nations, only to be rejected and countered with violent attacks against Israeli citizens.

I ask, brother, is the memory of the authors of the Call for Repentance so short they cannot remember buses exploding in Jerusalem, restaurant-goers being killed in Tel-Aviv, just to mention some of the atrocities? Yes, there are radical elements in Israeli society as well, but they are not applauded by the general populace as are radicals in Palestinian society, nor supported by Israeli law. That is why some of them are in Israeli jails. Nor, but for a single case denounced by every element of Israeli society, the perpetrators of which are now in jail, have Hamas’ atrocities ever been paralleled by Israelis.

I am embarrassed by the fact the Call for Repentance chooses to ignore the antisemitism and anti-Israel demonstrations evidenced in many parts of the world in support of the Palestinian cause when it states, “some are also complicit in the rise of the anti-Palestinian hate speech which we are witnessing in numerous western countries and media outlets today”. What does the slogan “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” mean if not the utter destruction of the Jewish State and the obviating of Jewish national aspirations, not to speak of the murder of all Israelis?

The Call for Repentance is void of the slightest disavowal of Hamas’ conduct, such as would be expected of Christians. There is no expression of sorrow or shame following the atrocities of October 7; no call for Hamas to desist from the torture of abductees and to expedite their release. Instead, there is an implied justification of Hamas’ conduct when, after denouncing Israel, Israel exclusively, the authors of the Call write “(we) are deeply troubled by the failure of some western Christian leaders and theologians to acknowledge the biblical tradition of justice and mercy, as first proclaimed by Moses... and the prophets..., and as exemplified and embodied in Christ) ... We are steadfast in our hope, resilient in our witness, and continue to be

committed to the Gospel of faith, hope, and love, in the face of tyranny and darkness. 'In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God's goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here 'a new land' and 'a new human being', capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters' (Kairos Palestine, §10)".

Repentance is indeed due, and love is certainly appropriate — but, dear brother, should it be as one-sided and as free-handed with facts as is evidenced in the Call for Repentance issued by our Palestinian brethren?

I pray for the day when Christian on both sides of the political divide will dare stand up for biblical truth and demand of their nations the kind of love, justice and kindness to which biblical principles call us all. I invite you to dare take up that stand with me.

In Christ,

Rev. Baruch Maoz MA

*

Gaza Civilians are protesting Hamas' hoarding of fuel, food and medication allowed into the Gaza Strip, thereby creating the humanitarian crises the terror organization professedly wishes to avoid. Trucks carrying supplies are stopped and looted by angry civilians.

Hamas fired scores of rockets at the city of Be'er Sheva and various Israelis villages, most of which were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome. Some damage was incurred but no injuries.

Hezbollah fired 10 rockets at the city of Kiryat Shmona, causing damage to a number of buildings. Israel is demanding the implementation of UN's Security Council's Resolution 1701, signed by the Lebanese Parliament, Hezbollah and Israel and which determined Hezbollah will not move troops or weaponry south of the Litani river, proximate to Lebanon's border with Israel. Hezbollah has announced it will not abide by the terms of the Resolution.

The Houthis fired another ballistic missile at Eilat, Israel's southern port city. It was intercepted over the Red Sea, long before it reached its target.