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Lutheran European Commission on the Church and the Jewish People | 31.08.2010

## **Statement of LEKKJ regarding the "Kairos Palestine Declaration"**

It is important for us to listen to Palestinian Christians on how they see their situation and assess their possibilities to reach a better life in the Holy Land. People, who tell that they experience, repression and injustice, have the right to be heard with sincerity and compassion. The declaration presents itself as an expression of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering. The Christian church has a vocation to engage in the needs of those suffering and to work for their rights and contribute to reconciliation. This should be done to all people, "but not least to those who are our sisters and brothers in the Christian faith".

We are glad that the declaration points to mutual respect and love as a way to peace and reconciliation. Only through love it is possible to see the face of God in the faces of our fellow human beings and search for a common future in peace for all mankind.

We have compassion for the Palestinians and their current human condition. We, however, find it necessary, to distance ourselves decisively from the one-sided and inequitable thoughts and appeals presented in the declaration. Reconciliation demands both a will and an ability to listen to and understand how the other part experiences the reality.

LEKKJ is striving to advance and enhance Jewish-Christian dialogue, and has a well documented record of combating anti-Judaism anti-Semitism for many decades. We are therefore both saddened and perturbed to find anti-Jewish patterns of thought, such as the presentation of *"the new teaching of Jesus" in contrast to "the dead letter in stone" „that is used as a weapon in our present history in order to deprive us of our rights in our own land."* (2.2.2) This contrast-pattern is an expression of anti-Jewish language.

Our other concern relates to the political analysis. It does not do justice to the complexity of the conflict. The causes of violence and terror are seen solely as the outcome of the occupation. *„However, if there were no occupation, there would be no resistance, no fear and no insecurity. This is our understanding of the situation."* (1.4.) This is a historical over-simplification, which is not anchored in historical facts reflecting the narrative of all parties to the conflict and the convolution of the situation.

A major problem of the declaration is its ambiguity in many places. While the text may be understood as advocating non-violence, some sentences can be read as a justification of violence. On one hand the text says that *„God created us not so that we might engage in strife and conflict but rather that we might come and know and love one another, and together build up the land in love and mutual respect."* (2.1) On the other hand violence is described as *„Palestinian legal resistance aiming at ending it [the occupation]."* (1.5). We miss an unequivocal statement of the signatories distancing themselves from acts of terror perpetrated by Palestinian groups and individuals.

Furthermore, the concerns of Israeli citizens are not taken into consideration. We find neither a perception of nor any compassion for Israeli pain and fears. The declaration expresses no

understanding of the historical connection the Jewish people has to the land, no understanding of the rites and decrees of the Jewish faith connected to the land and no understanding of the Jewish identity anchored to God's words regarding the land. We do acknowledge, that Palestinians too have historical connections to the same land area and know it as their home. Concurrently we miss in the declaration an acknowledging of the right of the Jewish state of Israel to exist in peace and security.

We reject any calls for boycotts. They have too often in history been a weapon in the arsenal of anti-Semites.

As Lutherans in Europe we advocate listening to the concerns and pain of both Palestinians and Israelis. We call for a differentiated and nuanced perception and discussion. We support projects and positions working towards a political solution in the spirit of mutual respect and non-violent reconciliation.