



Statement by the Evangelical Church of Westphalia (EKvW) on the topic of “Israel” at the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches

adopted on 19 January 2023 by the Church Executive of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia after preparation by the Standing Theological Committee

The Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in September 2022 in Karlsruhe included a debate on the relationship of the churches with Israel. The Evangelical Church of Westphalia (EKvW), having taken note of the debate and the assembly decisions, issues the following statement in response:

1. In article 1 of its constitution, the EKvW confesses belief in “the Triune God, who made heaven and earth, chose Israel as God’s people and keeps faith with the One who, in the Jew Jesus, the crucified and risen Christ, calls people to himself and, through the Holy Spirit, makes both the Church and Israel God’s witnesses and heirs according to the promise”. This fundamental insight into God’s keeping faith with the people of Israel and not rejecting them is also the basis of every statement on the Israel–Palestine conflict.
2. The EKvW stands for dual solidarity, which means with the people both in Israel and in Palestine. In November 2021 the EKvW, together with four other German regional churches (Protestant Church in Baden, Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau, Protestant Church of the Palatinate, Evangelical Church in the Rhineland) published a discussion paper entitled “Israel – Palestine. Guiding Thoughts and Explanatory Theses”. In it, the EKvW affirms the “the vision of an unchallenged and recognized State of Israel living side by side with a free and sovereign State of Palestine in the midst of a peaceful Middle East”. It endorses the statements of the Evangelical Middle East Commission (EMOK) of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD – Protestant Church in Germany) and continues to press for “the growth of justice and peace in Israel and Palestine”.
3. At its founding assembly in 1948 the WCC condemned anti-Semitism as a “sin against God and humankind”. In response to the decisions of the United Nations’ World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001, the WCC delegation to the conference expressed dissent on three issues. It said No to equating Zionism and racism, No to charging Israel with apartheid, and No to a general boycott of Israel. We welcome the fact that the WCC 11th assembly did not revoke this position on the Israel–Palestine conflict.
4. In the document for decision “Seeking Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East,” the WCC assembly deplores the upsurge of violence in the Israel–Palestine conflict. It fundamentally reaffirms “the rightful place of the State of Israel in the international community of nations and [...] the right of the Palestinians for self-determination.” In respect of the charge of apartheid, the WCC assembly does not support the motion of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, but does name the cause of dissension. “Within this Assembly, some churches and delegates strongly support the utilization of this term [...], while others find it inappropriate, unhelpful and painful.”

5. The EKVW agrees with the document “Seeking Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East” in its assessment that the situation in Palestine is profoundly disturbing. The grievances mentioned in the document such as occupation, expanding settlements, discrimination and the prohibition of human rights organizations stand in the way of a peaceful solution and the EKVW condemns them, just as it condemns the terrorist attacks and the continued firing of rockets at targets in Israel. The EKVW regards it as inappropriate to apply the term ‘apartheid’ to Israel. On this matter, it agrees with the EKD delegates at the WCC assembly. Moreover, it is perplexed at the naming of the dissension, since dissenting views are not normally mentioned explicitly in WCC documents for decision.

6. The EKVW criticizes the disproportionate concentration on Israel in the document “Seeking for Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East”. The document extensively names the Israeli government as responsible for various offences, whereas the harassment of Christian activity by the Palestinian Authority is mentioned only superficially. Besides Israel, the decision of the WCC assembly refers only superficially and generally to Syria and Iraq, without making an issue of the specific human rights violations committed by the regimes in place or the discrimination against churches there. The disastrous situation in countries like Lebanon, Iran, Egypt or Saudi Arabia is passed over in complete silence. Concentrating on the conflicts in Israel/Palestine is a distortion of reality in view of the dramatic wars and human rights violations in the whole region. In so doing, the WCC decision lays itself open to the criticism of using anti-Semitic arguments, given the fact that double standards regarding the moral assessment of the actions of individual states impose an unjustified extra moral burden upon the Jewish State. Here the WCC does not take its own emphasis on combating anti-Semitism sufficiently seriously.

7. In its Unity Statement, the WCC assembly sees church unity as rooted in the love of Christ. While appreciating all the positive approaches of the Unity Statement, the EKVW views it as theologically questionable that the statement at no point refers to the fundamental significance of Israel or Jewish faith to Christianity and the Jewish identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Such a lack of reference to Judaism opens the doors to an anti-Judaism that must have no further place in the teaching and faith of the churches after the Shoah.

8. In future, too, the EKVW will continue to strengthen relations with its Jewish sisters and brothers, and to intensify the dialogue with them. It supports encounter between people of Jewish and Christian faith at all levels, advocates for scholarly engagement with the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, and combats anti-Semitic tendencies inside and outside its structures.

Documents mentioned in the above statement:

- Constitution of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia:
<https://www.kirchenrecht-ekvw.de/document/5732>
- Israel – Palestine. Guiding Thoughts and Explanatory Theses:
https://www.evangelisch-in-westfalen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Themen/interreligoeser_dialog/Israel-Palaestina/Israel_-_Palestine_-_Januar_2022_-_englisch-final.pdf
German version: https://www.evangelisch-in-westfalen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Themen/interreligoeser_dialog/Israel-Palaestina/Israel_-_Palaestina_-_November_2021_EKVW.pdf
- Statement of the WCC Delegation at the UN World Conference against Racism in 2001:
[World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Durban, South Africa, 26 August – 7 September 2001 | World Council of Churches \(www.oikoumene.org\)](http://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/seeking-justice-and-peace-for-all-in-the-middle-east)
- Seeking Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East:
<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/seeking-justice-and-peace-for-all-in-the-middle-east>
- WCC 2022: Unity Statement:
<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/unity-statement-of-the-wcc-11th-assembly>