Statement on Kairos Palestine

31/03/2012 | Kirchenkonferenz of the Evangelical Church in Germany

Statement of the Executive Committee of the Protestant Middle East Commission (EMOK) and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) on

“A Moment of Truth. A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of the Palestinian Suffering.”

A Moment of Truth

Part 1: Which positive and new elements do we perceive in this document?

In December 2009, Palestinian Christians and Church leaders in Jerusalem published a document entitled “A moment of truth. A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering”.

This document is a cry for help coming from people who have to live under Israeli occupation and suffer from it. As such it should be heard in the ecumenical community of churches, and its concerns have to be taken seriously. The document is an expression of the Christian faith that this situation can change and must change.

The appeal is addressed to Palestinian Christians and aims at strengthening their hope. It explains to Palestinian Muslims the Christian message of love (5.4.1). It serves as a signal towards the State of Israel, and it calls for the solidarity of fellow Christians in the worldwide ecumenical community.

We observe that the State of Israel is assumed and acknowledged as a political counterpart in the document, which implies a positive answer to the question of the State of Israel’s right of existence. In our view both the right of existence of the State of Israel and the Palestinians’ right to an independent state are decisive criteria to assess any statement or opinion voiced on the conflict between Israel, the Palestinians, and their neighbouring countries.

The appeal positions itself in opposition to the instrumentalisation of religion in a political conflict with the following words: “Therefore, religion cannot favour or support any unjust political regime, but must rather promote justice, truth and human dignity. It must exert every effort to purify regimes where human beings suffer injustice and human dignity is violated” (3.4.3.). We endorse this fully and completely and recognise here a challenge to which our own Christian theology has to be submitted again and again; we also perceive in these words a clear rejection of radical religious and political voices among the so-called Christian Zionists, among radical religious groups in Jewish Israeli society, and in Islam. Dialogue between religions is correctly designated as an important instrument of reconciliation.

The Protestant Middle East Commission (EMOK) is very grateful for this appeal, and we feel it deserves our full attention. We particularly appreciate the fact that it clearly expresses readiness for reconciliation, a will for non-violence, and the renunciation of all forms of revenge and retaliation (4.2.6) based on the concept of Christian love, for example in 4.2.5: “We do not resist with death but rather through respect of life”. The members of the Protestant Middle East Commission (EMOK) stress that they are willing to perceive a common perspective in this decided will to strive for peace and wish to continue clarifying discussions. They point out that there have already been

Copyright JCRelations

many different kinds of responses to the invitation to “come and see” extended in the document and visits are paid on numerous occasions – in the form of different partnerships between churches, parishes, Christian institutions and projects as well as in practical solidarity within the framework of the EAPPI programme.

Part 2: Comments and Reservations.

on 3.3. **Dialogue between religions is an important contribution towards reconciliation in the conflict**: Palestinian Christian-Muslim dialogue is without any doubt of great significance. However, all three religions are important for the dialogue, which should be more comprehensive than just an effort “to breach the walls imposed by the occupation” (3.3.2). It is imperative to overcome “the distorted perception” (3.3.2.) and “the resentments of the past” (3.3.4.) between human beings. Disunity between Christians should also be viewed self-critically.

We understand the appeal as an expression of the Palestinian people’s suffering and we recognise the hardship caused by the Israeli occupation. But is the occupation the sole cause for the misery of the Palestinian people? Will the end of the occupation automatically put an end to the suffering? We would like to see more precise differentiation and definition of causes and consequences from the worldwide Christian Community.

This applies, for example, to 4.3. **“The roots of ‘terrorism’ are in the human injustice committed and in the evil of the occupation.”** Unfortunately we have to point out the existence of Muslim Palestinian Groups which have been fighting andare still fighting Israel as a State as a matter of principle, quite irrespective of the occupation. Of course we can criticise the actions of the Israeli government or condemn the occupation, but we cannot simply dismiss the fight against terrorism as a mere “pretence” (4.3.).

It would be of great help if the authors of the appeal could make it clear that by “occupation” they mean occupation of those regions conquered by Israel in June 1967, and not the Israeli national territory within the armistice line of 1949 which is accepted as Israel’s border by the international community. The differentiation which we feel is necessary here also implies the recognition that constitutional structures urgently need to be built up within Palestinian society in order to achieve justice and peace.

We feel it is important to draw attention to the fact that the statement “(we) hold in high regard all those who have given their life for our nation” (4.2.5.) can in our view under no circumstances include those people who have brought their own lives to an end by killing other people by violent means.

The appeal advises its readers “to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation.” A general call to boycott Israel reminds the churches in Germany of the Nazi-appeal of 1933 “Do not buy from Jews!”; for this reason we cannot accept such a boycott. However, we ask: What other acts of solidarity can be conceived of for the benefit of the Palestinian people? How can we improve the Palestinians’ means of living and avoid purchasing goods from the illegal Israeli settlements?

The appeal sees itself as a “call to repentance; to revisit fundamentalist theological positions that support certain unjust political options with regard to the Palestinian people.” (6.1.). The EMOK agrees with this statement in its general sense, yet would like to explore the specific positions the authors had in mind.

If we understand the appeal correctly as implying that a theological conversion (metanoia) is necessary as regards the way in which the lasting promises given to the people of Israel by God

Copyright JCRelations

are interpreted in the Churches of Europe and North America, this means that a theological dialogue with our Christian brothers and sisters in Palestine is needed. We agree on the position that no theology may be misused in order to justify the suffering of people.

The distribution of the appeal as a “Kairos Document” by the World Council of Churches and the analogies to South Africa drawn in the document itself, in the authors’ accompanying text and in numerous speeches by the WCC General Secretary at the time suggest an analogy with the South African “Kairos Document” of 1985 and generate associations with the struggle against the Apartheid regime. In the view of the EMOK this analogy is problematic. We would advise against describing the situation in a way which can be seen as ideologising. However, we certainly understand the appeal as a “Kairos” in the sense that “Now is the time to act!”

EMOK Executive Committee, 22 April 2010.

Church Parliament (Kirchenkonferenz) of EKD, 31st August 2011

Translated from the German.

Copyright JCRelations