

Advocating for the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation

BE IT RESOLVED that the _____ Conference of the United Methodist Church:

Joins the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, as well as numerous other Christian denominations and organizations, in endorsing H.R. 2590, Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act; and

Calls upon all clergy and laity of the Conference to educate themselves about the plight of Palestinian children and families living under Israeli military occupation and the reasons for Christians to oppose U.S. funds being used to detain, torture, and imprison Palestinian children in military detention, to subject Palestinian families to widespread home evictions and demolitions, and to annex Palestinian territory; and

Encourages all clergy and laity of the Conference to write, call, or meet with their legislators in Congress, to urge their Representative to co-sponsor H. R. 2590 and to urge their Senators to introduce, co-sponsor, and support a companion bill to H. R. 2590; and,

Directs the Conference Secretary to write to all legislators representing the region of the Conference in the U.S. Congress, informing them that the Conference has endorsed H.R. 2590 and that the Conference urges them to co-sponsor and support H.R. 2590 in the House of Representatives or to introduce, co-sponsor, and support a companion bill in the Senate. A full copy of this resolution should be provided with that correspondence.

RATIONALE:

In April 2021, Rep. Betty McCollum (MN-4) introduced a landmark piece of legislation to the U.S. Congress: H.R. 2590, Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act.¹

The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society has joined over 170 human rights and faith-based organizations in endorsing H.R. 2590. Those endorsements include: The Episcopal Church, The Presbyterian Church (USA), The United Church of Christ, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the National Council of Churches USA, Church World Service, Pax Christi USA, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR), Jewish Voice for Peace, American Muslims for Palestine, and IfNotNow.²

This bill “seeks to promote justice, equality and human rights for Palestinian children and families by prohibiting Israeli authorities from using U.S. taxpayer funds to detain and torture Palestinian children, demolish and seize Palestinian homes, and further annex Palestinian Land in the occupied West Bank,” in violation of international law.

Israel is the only country in the world that systematically prosecutes children in military courts. Each year approximately 700 Palestinian children enter the abusive Israeli military detention system; a UNICEF report has described the problem as “widespread, systemic,

and institutionalized.” Children as young as twelve have been subjected to arrest and imprisonment. Children are often held and interrogated for hours or days with no attorney and without the presence or knowledge of their parents. A large majority of these children report severe physical and emotional abuse during their detention.³

The United Methodist Book of Discipline in the Social Principles clearly affirms the rights of children: “children have the rights to food, shelter, clothing, health care, and emotional well-being....In particular, children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation and abuse.”⁴

Furthermore, United Methodists have repeatedly adopted resolutions and endorsed measures to protect the rights of Palestinian children, at both the general church and annual Conference levels.⁵

The United Methodist Church also has affirmed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which says “No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,” and “the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.”⁶

For decades, Israel has relentlessly perpetrated the seizure and destruction of Palestinian property and the forcible transfer of civilians in the Israeli-controlled Palestinian territories, in violation of international and humanitarian law. In 2021, Israel demolished more than 850 Palestinian homes and other structures in the West Bank including East Jerusalem; over 1100 Palestinians lost their homes, including more than 400 children. At the beginning of 2022, thousands of Palestinians in East Jerusalem are living under imminent threat of losing their homes to demolition or to expulsion and replacement by settlers.

Israel continues to aggressively expand its illegal settlements in Palestinian territory with thousands of additional living units per year. Since the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank began in 1967, Israel has moved 700,000 or more Israeli citizens illegally into the occupied Palestinian territory.⁷

In 2020, Israel stated its goal to formally and permanently annex to itself large segments of the West Bank to make way for more illegal settlements, in flagrant violation of international law. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, declared this would not only seriously damage peace efforts, but would have a “disastrous impact on human rights.”

The United Methodist Church has long and adamantly opposed Israel’s colonization and annexation of occupied Palestinian territory, restating that firm position for decades in the resolution “Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land.”⁸

In May 2021, the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society joined over 100 faith and social justice organizations in calling on the Biden Administration to condemn Israeli government plans to forcibly displace Palestinians to further their illegal annexation and ethnic cleansing of occupied East Jerusalem.⁹

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1. The bill, H.R. 2590: Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israel Occupation Act
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2590/>
 2. HR 2590 Endorsing Organizations:
https://nwttac.dci-palestine.org/hr_2590_endorsing_organizations
 3. UNICEF report – Children in Israeli Military Detention:
<https://www.unicef.org/sop/reports/children-israeli-military-detention>
 3. Defense for Children International–Palestine (DCIP) No Way To Treat A Child campaign:
<http://nwttac.dci-palestine.org>
 3. United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR) resource: Palestinian Children & the Israeli Occupation: https://www.kairosresponse.org/quick_facts_series.html
 4. The Social Principles: The Social Community: ¶162 C, The Rights of Children
<https://www.cokesbury.com/book-of-discipline-book-of-resolutions-free-versions>
 5. United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR) report – Annual Conference Resolutions Focus on Palestinian Children:
https://www.kairosresponse.org/2018_ac_resolutions_palestinian_children.html
 6. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 37 A, B,
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
 7. B'Tselem report – A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is Apartheid:
https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid
 7. Human Rights Watch report – A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>
 8. United Methodist Book of Resolutions 2016, Resolution 6111:
<https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-opposition-to-israeli-settlements-in-palestinian-land>
 9. The Hill: Progressive groups call for Biden to denounce evictions of Palestinians as 'war crimes'
<https://thehill.com/policy/international/553472-more-than-100-progressive-groups-call-for-biden-to-denounce-evictions-of>