



UMKR commends UNSC resolution, US role in its passage, and Kerry's statement

December 30, 2016 – United Methodists for Kairos Response commends the passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2334 on December 23, the abstention by the United States that made its passage possible, and the statement by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on December 28 regarding the U.S. decision. Notwithstanding deficiencies many have noted in all three, we believe these events have historic significance and are encouraging signs of the changing public and political discourse, particularly in the United States, on Israeli violations of Palestinians' human rights and international law.

Many years of advocacy have led to headline-making divestment actions by the United Methodist Church, the successful efforts of allies in numerous Christian denominations and other faith communities, the resolutions adopted on dozens of U.S. and international campuses, and the worldwide actions taken by hundreds of corporations, financial institutions and government bodies. All have contributed substantially to the crucial change in discourse that made this month's events possible.

The potential for long-term political and legal ramifications of the UNSC resolution, the Obama administration's refusal to protect the Israeli government's policies in the UNSC, the Secretary's reinforcement of long-standing U.S. opposition to Israeli settlements, and the effect these events can have on U.S. voters' perception of Israel and its settlements enterprise are all reasons to hope for more progress toward a just peace in Israel/Palestine in 2017 and beyond.

Resolution 2334 is the first UNSC resolution in over 35 years to deal so specifically with the settlements and the first that the Obama administration has allowed to pass, having vetoed a similar resolution in 2011. In this month's resolution, the Security Council "reaffirms that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace." The Council also "reiterates its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem." [See the full text of the resolution here](#)

Numerous commentators have described the significance of the resolution as merely "symbolic" and have noted deficiencies in it: the resolution promotes the two-state solution, which many in Israel/Palestine and around the world have said is no longer realistic or indeed feasible; it attempts to prop up the moribund "peace process," which many have long recognized as an opportunity for Israel to continue colonizing Palestinian territory; it was adopted under the UN Charter's Chapter VI and thus is a non-binding resolution; it has no immediate practical application and no measures for enforcement when Israel rejects it (which the Israeli government has already said it will do); and it does not explicitly call for any

sanctions against Israel by member states or legal action in international courts.

Similarly, many have criticized the U.S. government's decision not to protect Israel with a veto as in the past as "too little too late" from the world power most responsible for enabling the same illegal Israeli settlement activity the resolution condemns, and have noted that this action does not absolve the U.S. of responsibility for the unparalleled \$38 billion gift of military aid for Israel earlier this year.

Nevertheless, UMKR sees strong reasons to commend UNSC Resolution 2334 and the U.S. role in allowing it to pass and believes that the importance of these actions should not be underestimated.

The resolution could have significant political and legal ramifications: it may provide cause for the International Criminal Court, currently engaged in an examination of alleged Israeli and Palestinian war crimes, to expand its investigation of Israeli settlements and perhaps proceed to prosecution; it may provide a legal avenue for member states to proceed with legal actions currently considered against companies that are complicit in Israel's settlement enterprise; and it also may provide an opening for UN member states to proceed with sanctions against Israel.

Many political analysts recognize that one of the most important factors in Israel's nearly 50-year-long occupation of Palestinian territory and egregious violations of Palestinian rights is the unflagging political protection and financial aid from the United States, which has had nearly unanimous bipartisan support in the U.S. political arena. Changes in the U.S. electorate's views of Israel, as seen both in recent polls and the 2016 debate over the Democratic Party platform, have just begun to be reflected in their elected officials' positions. Much more change among American voters and eventually in the U.S. halls of power is needed if the potential U.S. influence on Israel's policies is ever to be used for positive change on the ground. The U.S. abstention in this UNSC vote, given the prominence and debate it is receiving in American media, can be expected to further affect U.S. public opinion of Israel's settlement enterprise.

In his statement on December 28, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry clearly reiterated long-standing U.S. opposition to Israeli settlements, included reference to Palestinians' original dispossession at Israel's founding, identified the current political trend toward a one-state solution, and cited the mutually exclusive Israeli claims of being both a "Jewish" state and a "democratic" state if Israel refuses to relinquish the Palestinian territory in which millions of Palestinians lack all democratic rights under Israel's military occupation. These positive facets of his statement are long overdue. Serious flaws in the statement include the failure to sufficiently uphold important Palestinian rights such as the refugees' right of return and the right to equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, which are necessary for a comprehensive and just peace in Israel/Palestine. However, UMKR believes it important to commend the positive aspects of this statement despite its tardiness and deficiencies, if only to encourage more progress by U.S. leaders in the future. [See the full text of Kerry's statement here.](#)

In light of their heated and retaliatory responses to the U.N. resolution, U.S. abstention and

Kerry's statement, Israeli leaders seem to recognize that all these events have served to further isolate Israel for its treatment of the Palestinians and to confer on Israel the status of a rogue state in the international community.

This month's events can be attributed in part to years of dedicated justice advocacy in the United States and worldwide that have led to hundreds of political and economic actions, all of which have helped to reframe the narrative about Israel's past and current behavior and to facilitate more just and effective action by the current U.S. administration. Among those headline-making, discourse-changing actions, UMKR notes both the United Methodist Church's divestment in June 2014 from G4S for its involvement in human rights violations in Israel/Palestine, the first such divestment action by a "mainline" church in the United States, and the historic United Methodist pension fund action in December 2015, divesting from and barring investment in five Israeli banks and one Israeli construction company due to their complicity in Israeli settlements and violations of human rights.

Together with our many allies within the United Methodist Church and beyond, United Methodists for Kairos Response will continue to exert pressure on corporations and governments to uphold human rights and international law and will work to educate our fellow United Methodists in the cause of equal rights for all Palestinians and Israelis.

Learn more about UMKR at our website: www.kairosresponse.org
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