



**Pursuing Peace and Strengthening Presence:
The Atlanta Summit of Churches in the USA and the Holy Land**

The Carter Center in Atlanta, GA
April 19 - 20, 2016.

Summit Document
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Preamble

1. We have come together in this unique first-time large scale Summit for Christian churches and church-related organizations from the USA and the Holy Land following the example and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ on peacemaking, the dignity owed to all created in God’s image and kindling the hope that some day there will be a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land.
2. 2017 will mark 50 years since the occupation of the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. In the Bible, the 50th year is a year of jubilee when land is given back to its original owners, a year of freedom, forgiveness, and mercy.
3. Also significant is that we are meeting in Atlanta- the birthplace of Civil Rights Movement leader the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, whose prophetic ministry challenged officially sanctioned racial segregation in the US, while working towards greater justice and freedom for African Americans through nonviolence. We continue to be inspired by his dream in spite of all the challenges and adversities.

Our Purpose in Meeting

4. We have come together for two days of prayer and open dialogue in a spirit of theological and ethical urgency for a just peace, and to express our ecumenical unity in action towards the end of occupation and a lasting political solution in the Holy Land. We honor the land that witnessed to the life and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, affirming His call to justice, peacemaking and to the ministry of justice and reconciliation.
5. For decades the Holy Land, the land of redemption and universal reconciliation, has been a land of war, oppression, injustice and death. All the world’s Christians trace their faith’s roots to the Holy Land: it is the spiritual homeland for all Christians in the world. Therefore, Christians everywhere are called to prayer and action for healing in the Holy Land. They are called to act for justice and peace in the Holy Land. Peace with justice requires ending the long conflict, occupation, injustice and all acts

of violence and terrorism and bringing back the land we call Holy to wholeness, peace, redemption and reconciliation for all of its inhabitants.

6. We affirm, therefore, that as Christian churches, we have a responsibility to take an active role in bringing this chronic conflict to a just peace. As Christians, we acknowledge the spiritual kinship we share with other children of Abraham, and the common imperative to love our neighbor and thus to respect other communities of faith.

7. We also acknowledge and affirm our obligation to continue the prophetic role of the Church, in speaking the truth in love and speaking truth to power. We are called to speak out again and again. We refuse to be silenced and we refuse to cease working for justice and peace.

Our Beliefs and Affirmations

8. We believe that working towards a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict would not only serve the cause of peace and justice in the Holy Land but also promote peace in the Middle East region in general. A just peace would take away from those who take advantage by exploiting this conflict to serve their own motives, thereby compounding the perpetuation of injustices.

9. We affirm that the two-state solution, built on the basis of international resolutions, in which both Israelis and Palestinians can live in neighborly relations and at peace with each other, must be viable politically, geographically, economically and socially. As such, we believe that:

a- The continuing occupation of Palestinian lands beyond the 1967 borders and measures and laws that continue to constrain and control the Palestinian population, in contravention of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, must end. These actions prevent economic and social development, and constrain the exercise of political rights. We need to focus on bringing a new sense of equality, inclusivity, and mutual respect among all the citizens of the Land, regardless of religious affiliation or ethnicity.

b- The continuing expansion of illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands increasingly dims the hopes and realistic prospects for a two-state solution and is a major threat to peace.

c- Jerusalem, sacred for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is viewed as a capital city for Palestine and Israel and an open, shared city with no walls, where the rights of all are equal and respected. To this end freedom of worship for people of all three faiths must be protected and attacks, such as so-called “price tag” incidents (retaliation graffiti) against churches and holy sites, prevented.

d- Churches and church-related organizations need to work together proactively to protect the existing and future presence of Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land. The current absence of a just political solution affects their presence and causes many of these Palestinian “living stones” (Luke 19:40) to seek dignified life in freedom outside the troubled Holy Land. A just and peaceful solution is imperative and will contribute to protecting the presence and active participation and involvement of the Palestinian “living stones” in the Holy Land and into a peaceful future.

10. We therefore call on both Palestinians and Israelis to do more to affirm the human dignity of the other, and urge their leaders to fulfill their responsibilities to do more to assure opportunity, security and peace for all the people of the Holy Land.

Issues Requiring Our Attention

11. The issues that merit special attention in which we can effectively promote peace with justice in the Holy Land, and to advance the two–state solution for Palestinians and Israelis and the three Abrahamic religions to live in peace include the following:

In Peacemaking:

- a- Develop a more effective advocacy in the USA.
- b- Advocate and reach out to politicians and public figures and to a cross-section of the population.
- c- Educate the members of our congregations on the necessity and merits of a peace process that would result in fulfilling the right of Palestinians to self-determination and to their own independent state as well as the rights of all people and nations in the region, including Israel, to live in security and peace.
- d- Urge the US administration, Congress, politicians and public figures to adopt balanced and just positions that would pave the way for, and meaningfully accompany the necessary steps toward, a just and enduring solution of the conflict and a lasting peace.
- e- Strengthen initiatives with various faith-based groups and communities in the United States that would inform and provide substantive input to the political process of making peace between Palestinians and Israelis.
- f- Support initiatives to nurture deeper insight and understanding of existing and future opportunities for interreligious collaboration, especially in providing humanitarian assistance to all people in need, including those in Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem, and all areas of the Holy Land.
- g- Recognize, affirm and support the solidarity that is being demonstrated among some Christians, Jews, and Muslims--and some of the leaders of these communities in the Holy Land – especially in addressing humanitarian needs, fighting poverty, and fostering peace.
- h- Find appropriate ways to exert economic leverage on commercial and governmental actors to end unfair and unjust practices and policies which violate international laws and conventions
- i- Propose steps that can be contemplated by the governing bodies of various churches in the USA on issues of peace building, and relations with churches and communities in Palestine and the Holy Land.

j- Designate a common day of prayer and reflections across the churches in the USA and the Holy Land to focus all of our prayers on a just and comprehensive peace in Palestine, Israel and the Middle East.

k- Exercise our obligation to educate our constituencies regarding the damaging consequences of certain versions of dispensationalist theology and fundamentalist Christian teachings that create obstacles to peace, the two-state solution and peaceful coexistence in present-day Palestine and Israel.

In Strengthening the Christian Presence in the Holy Land:

a- Engage in mutual visits and exchanges with the Churches and their leaders, to strengthen the resolve for ongoing commitment and hard work for peace and justice in the Holy Land.

b- Increase community-based pilgrimages and authentic tourism to the Holy Land with the intent to stay in Palestinian towns and villages in order to engage with indigenous communities, to experience first-hand their hopes and fears and to contribute to their community and economic development.

c- Work with denominational, ecumenical, and interfaith partners to strengthen relationships and efforts towards a common witness for peace in Palestine and Israel.

d- Support development in Palestine through creative social and economic investment, thus witnessing to our commitment to operate at the intersection of faith and finance.

e- Strengthen existing efforts and identify new models of church solidarity in action.

f- Support local churches and Church related organizations not only to survive, but also to thrive and continue their ministries through educational, health, cultural and social services.

g- Encourage reference to the Kairos Palestine message as an established initiative

We remain committed to work on these issues and to follow up on this Summit and on the issues presented above including a possible conference in the Holy Land.

The Carter Center, Atlanta, Georgia
April 20, 2016.

Heads of Churches and Ecumenical Bodies

Vicken Aykazian, Archbishop, The Armenian Church

John R. Bryant, Senior Bishop, The African Methodist Episcopal Church

Oscar Cantú, Bishop of Las Cruces and Chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace

Iva E. Carruthers, General Secretary, Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference, Inc.

Michael D. Castle, President, Alliance of Baptists

Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop, The Episcopal Church USA

John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President, United Church of Christ

Suhail Dawani, Archbishop, The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Ibrahim Faltas, Treasurer, Custody of the Holy Land

Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church

Michel Jalakh, General Secretary, Middle East Council of Churches

Thomas Kemper, General Secretary of the General Board of Global Mission, United Methodist Church

Carlos Malave, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together

John L. McCullough, President and CEO, Church World Service

Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church (USA)

Tyrone S. Pitts, General Secretary Emeritus, Progressive National Baptist Convention INC

Ervin Stutzman, Executive Director, Mennonite Church USA

Theofilos III, Patriarch, The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary, World Council of Churches

Fouad Twal, Patriarch, Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Jim Winkler, General Secretary and President, National Council of Churches

Munib Younan, Bishop, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

Heads of Church related organizations

Tarek Abuata, Executive Director, FOSNA

Brian Bodager, President and CEO, The Pension Boards/UCC

Warren Clark, Executive Director, Churches for Middle East Peace

Yusef Daher, Executive Secretary, Jerusalem Inter-Church Center

Donald G. Hart, President of United Church Funds, United Church of Christ

Sam Jones, Co-Founder and President, Heartland Initiative

Michael La Civita, Communications Director, CNEWA

Anne Lynne, President, American Friends of Episcopal Diocese in Jerusalem

Beth Nelson Chase, Executive Director, Bright Stars of Bethlehem

Mitri Raheb, President, Diyar Consortium

Jack Y. Sara, President, Bethlehem Bible College

Michael Spath, Pilgrims of Ibillin

Ghassan J. Tarazi, Co-Founder, Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace

Jeffrey D. Thiemann, President and CEO, Portico Benefit Services (ELCA)

Ed Thompson, Co-Founder and President, Americans for a Vibrant Palestinian Economy

Signators

Varsen Aghabekian, The Commissioner General, The Independent Commission for Human Rights in Palestine

Vera Baboun, Mayor of Bethlehem

Hanna Amireh

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Salim Hodali
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Eleia Iskandar
Sharon Jones
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Zahi Khouri
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