

Paper 12

Israel Palestine Report

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte: slanecawte@gmail.com Philip Brooks: philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 26 1. General Assembly instructs the Mission Committee to raise awareness about Holy Land pilgrimage amongst synods, local churches, ecumenical partners and individuals, underlining the importance of taking time to engage with Christian Palestinian communities and members of the local Christian churches in Israel and Palestine. Resolution 27 2. General Assembly affirms that Israel is a country which is recognised within the international community of States, with all the rights and responsibilities attendant on that status. Resolution 28 3. General Assembly affirms the United Nations commitment to a State of Palestine which is recognised within the international community of Reslution 2 8 4. General Assembly condemns all acts of violence in the URC in response to that resolution. All Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, forced house demolitions and the acquisition of

land by coercion, are breaches of international law. General Assembly, therefore, urges the Israeli Government to abide by international law and reverse its de facto annexation of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Resolution 31

6. General Assembly requests local churches and members to contact their constituency MPs to express concerns about the actions of the Israeli Government with respect to settlement expansion and house demolitions, and to ask what the UK is doing in response.

Resolution 32

7. General Assembly recognises the ethical principles-based approach of the URC Trusts and Pension Funds to investing and commends them in this long-established commitment, so that they can continue to avoid investing in any international company which facilitates the following activities in the occupied Palestinian territories:
 - construction, production and services for the illegal settlements
 - the economic exploitation of labour and the captive Palestinian market
 - the illegal extraction and procurement of natural resources
 - population control through private security and surveillance where it contravenes international law
 - provision of specialised equipment for the forced demolition of Palestinian homes and structures
 - building and servicing of the separation wall / barrier and its checkpoints on Palestinian land
 - and any other breaches of international law.

Resolution 33

8. General Assembly affirms the ethical values of URC Synod Tru

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- **population control through private security and surveillance where it contravenes international law**
- **provision of specialised equipment for the forced demolition of Palestinian homes and structures**
- **building and servicing of the separation wall**

Summary of impact

Financial	The actions and work proposed are covered by existing budgets.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The resolutions express commitments and policy positions which many of our ecumenical partners share.

Introduction

1. Following on from the 2016 General Assembly resolution 37, the United Reformed Church has developed its work around the issues of the Israel / Palestine situation under the remit of the Mission Committee. The work has been extensive, and is recorded in reports to the 2018 and 2020 General Assemblies. One major aspect was the educational visit to Israel and Palestine in September 2019, in which 22 people took part, representing all 13 synods, URC Youth, Global and Intercultural Ministries, *Reform* Magazine, Commitment for Life and Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations. The ten-day visit was led by (then) General Assembly Moderator, Derek Estill. Participants saw at first hand many of the issues in the region. Close links were made with members of indigenous churches.

50 years of occupation (1947–2017).¹ The statistics highlighted how from 2009 to 2016, Israeli authorities demolished or seized over 4,800 Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, compared with an average rate of approval of applications for building permits for Palestinians in the same period of less than 3%. When the report was published, 611,000 Israeli settlers lived in 250 settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Illegal settlements remain on the increase. Only in May 2021, there was considerable unrest in East Jerusalem, as the Israeli authorities attempted to evict Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, located just outside the Old City, to give their homes to settlers.

5. Participants from the URC's 2019 educational visit witnessed the restricted access to water and electricity in the occupied territories. More than 70% of Palestinian communities are not connected to the water network. At least a third of Palestinians in East Jerusalem live in unlicensed homes, and face the risk of demolition and displacement.
6. In 2019 we visited Hebron City and saw the devastation and tension at first hand, as well as the disruption caused by the settlers. Nearly a third of the housing units in Hebron have been

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the time to engage with Palestinian communities or even with the leaders and members of the local Christian churches and centres in Israel and Palestine. Given the volume of Christian pilgrimages each year to the region, we believe there is scope to promote further the good work embodied in a film about pilgrimage, part funded by the URC, called *Walking the tightrope*

increasingly sophisticated and accessible. For those synods who have concerns about screening, it is important to note that the resolutions come in the form of a request and an understanding that further support might be needed. We envisage this as a process whereby we work towards the commitment, expressed by all the synods and embodied in the resolutions, in speaking out against the injustices experienced by the Palestinian people under occupation.

Summary

13. Resolution 37 from the 2016 General Assembly calls for 'synods, local churches and individuals to respond with informed prayer, grace and solidarity'. As the situation has worsened for the Palestinian people since 2016, and against the backdrop of additional deprivation caused by Covid-19, the call to stand more resolutely in solidarity with Christian Palestinian communities and members of the local Christian churches in Israel and Palestine is more compelling than ever. The resolutions for the 2021 General Assembly respond to their direct call for such solidarity. They build on the work which flowed from the 2016 resolution, as well as the fact that Palestine is a long-standing Commitment for Life partner. The resolutions commit us to practical ways in which we can genuinely be prophetic as a denomination.

In this context, and equipped by much reflection and prayer, the Mission Committee offers its resolutions to the 2021 General Assembly.

Resolution references

1. For Resolution 3: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1397.
2. For Resolution 9: European Commission, Interpretative Notice eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/20151111_interpretative_notice_indication_of_origin_en.pdf
3. For Resolution 10, please see: Fine foods from Palestine - Zaytoun; Fair Trade Palestinian Crafts - Hadeel - Fair Trade Palestinian Crafts. (Resolution 10) zaytoun.uk/