

Statement of a Consultative Meeting on a “Theology of Pilgrimage for Palestine”

Meeting in Geneva from May 18-21, 2010 we are 27 representatives of 23 organizations and institutions from 14 countries, including theologians representing seven Christian denominations, tourism activists and advocates, Palestinian Christian activists and tour operators. Inspired by the Palestine [Kairos document](#), we have come together to promote the concept of Pilgrimage for Transformation as a tool all Christians can use to work for the community of God as advocates for a just peace that will allow both Palestinians and Israelis to live together in peace and dignity.

The context

Palestinians have experienced 62 years of dispossession and exile and 43 years of occupation. This occupation has deprived them of human rights, reversed the progress of their economic development, and limited their access to education, health, free worship, and employment and isolated the Palestinians from each other. Settlement activity violates the Geneva Convention prohibition against an occupying power transferring its civilian population to the area it occupies. Continuing to tolerate this egregious situation of illegality and injustice threatens our collective humanity and security and undermines the potential of international law to peacefully regulate international affairs. We call on all people of faith to work for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine in accordance with UN Resolutions.

We express grave concern about the diminishing Palestinian Christian population whose continuous presence over the last 2000 years has maintained the traditions and community of our earliest Christian forbearers. We stress that the Israeli military’s prohibiting of Palestinians from entering Jerusalem to worship in their holy sites is unacceptable.

When pilgrims come to Palestine and do not engage with the Palestinians in their despair they are in fact reinforcing and supporting the occupation. These pilgrims actually take hope away from the whole region.

The Kairos document declared that occupation is a sin and this meeting emphasized the fact that many Christian interpretations are oppressive rather than liberating, and deny rather than support life. These contradict the basic Christian values of compassion, empathy, and the love of God for every person as well as forgoing the compelling Christian responsibility to work for justice and peace.

The monopoly held by Israeli travel sector and its state policies continues to cripple and hamper the growth of the Palestinian travel sector and its capacity to generate needed revenue for economic and social development.

We therefore call on:

- Churches to renounce and reject harmful Biblical interpretations and theologies which legitimize the occupation of Palestine and instead recognize God's preferential option for the poor and take up the Kairos call to "come and see".
- Pilgrims to fulfil their pilgrimage by abiding with the Code of Conduct agreed by the [Palestinian Initiative for Responsible Tourism](#) and searching for a new and deeper truth, participating in a purposeful and respectful journey with Palestinians through their land and their history, taking sufficient time to listen, reflect and pray with them, discerning God's presence in the Palestinian people's struggle for justice.
- Tourists to responsibly engage with the Palestinian people on their lands, spending at least half of their time with them, seeking a genuine encounter and learning about their lives and hopes and dreams.

Finally, we affirm the growing consciousness among many churches and pilgrims who are seeking an authentic encounter with the Palestinian people and further call on them to strongly carry their message forward to their constituencies.

Issued by:

[Alternative Tourism Group](#) (ATG), Palestine
[Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum](#) (WCC-PIEF),
[Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism](#) (ECOT)
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