



# A PRAYER FOR PEACE



Uniting Church in Australia  
National Assembly

# A PRAYER FOR PEACE

## Introduction

The pursuit of peace is at the core of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We echo his words when we share the greeting 'peace be with you' with members of our worshipping congregations each week. Jesus expresses the centrality of peacemaking in the Beatitudes; he preaches that peacemakers will be the children of God (Matt 5:9).

Undertaking the work of peacemaking can often appear difficult, seeming to be too vast and lofty a pursuit requiring more resources than we have at hand. Additionally, discerning what this work entails in practicality can result in us writing off any attempt at peacemaking as only a small drop in a broad ocean. It is easy to lament "What can I do?"

It is important to remember that the work of peace is not limited to the realm of governments maintaining peace within and between countries. It relates also to individuals, communities, and our Church. It requires of us thought, prayer and action. There is always something each of us can undertake to do that contributes to peace and reconciliation.

At its heart, peacemaking is not a static or passive pursuit. It is an active, dynamic response to our world and how we would see it. By engaging with the issues of our time, and giving prayerful consideration to the same, we engage in the work of peace.

From its inception, the Uniting Church in Australia has recognised the Christian imperative to work for peace. In 1977 the newly-created Church proclaimed its concern "for the welfare of the whole human race," emphasising it was "conscious of ... responsibilities within and beyond this country". In the years since, the Church has continually renewed these commitments. Assembly resolutions contained in Uniting for Peace state "that the Church is committed to [being] a peacemaking body" and to supporting and urging the Australian Government to support "mechanisms for ... building a culture of peace". These include "co-operation with governments, the United Nations, and community sector and religious organisations to develop peaceful solutions to conflict ..."

When looking to the Church's responsibilities beyond our shores, peace in the Holy Land is an issue of concern to us as Christians. This concern is born out of our Christian hope for a reconciled world generally, and more specifically through the knowledge that these lands were those in which Jesus exercised his ministry. However, this peace seems far off for the people of Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

The Holy Land is a region crying out for peace, justice and reconciliation. For decades, the Palestinian people have lived a precarious, uncertain existence, denied freedom

### WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ON THE HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT IN THE HOLY LAND?

The following links are helpful in explaining more fully this complex situation:

- The Question of Palestine at the United Nations - <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/home.htm>
- PIEF link - [www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/churches-in-the-middle-east/pief/pief-home.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/churches-in-the-middle-east/pief/pief-home.html)



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of movement, residence, and for many, citizenship. The persistent construction of Israeli settlements within the occupied Palestinian Territories, despite UN criticism, is of particular concern and poses a continual barrier to the peace process.

Churches around the world have, in recent years, been moved to act for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in a number of ways. This action has itself been peaceful, non-violent, and intended to encourage the governments of Israel and Palestine to intensify effort towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict between them. In July, 2011, the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Standing Committee resolved to take peaceful action in relation to this issue on behalf of the Assembly. This included a resolution to join the boycott of products produced in the illegal Israeli settlements within the Palestinian Territory of the West Bank .

This resolution was made in answer to a call from Palestinian Christians (Kairos Palestine, 2009), and in response to resolutions of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches in Australia. The Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly now invites its members and congregations to consider taking steps “to pray and work for a just and lasting peace for both Israelis and Palestinians” .

There are a number of ways in which members and congregations might add their voice to this prayer for peace in the Holy Land. These include writing letters to the Federal Government and the Federal Opposition, praying for peace for the people of Israel and the Palestinian people, becoming more familiar with the number of perspectives on the conflict, and may include a boycott of goods produced in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Please see page 3 of this document for a list of ten actions you might choose to take. Alternatively, visit:

[www.assembly.uca.org.au/prayerforpeace](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/prayerforpeace)

## Uniting Church in Australia - Jewish Relations

At the Twelfth Assembly (2010) the Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly adopted the document entitled *Jews & Judaism: A Statement by the Uniting Church in Australia* (Resolution 09.18.02). A copy of this Statement is included in your ‘A Prayer for Peace’ resources.

This Statement contained a resolution to affirm that both the State of Israel and a Palestinian State each have the right to live side by side in peace and security. We continue to advocate for a two state solution, brought about through a negotiated peace process. We continue to affirm the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure, internationally recognised borders.

The Uniting Church in Australia proudly enjoys long and close association with the Jewish community in our country through its National Jewish-Christian Dialogue. This relationship continues to be an important part of who we are as Church. To this end, in Resolution 09.18.02, the Uniting Church acknowledges that anti-Semitism in all its expressions is an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This resolution was reaffirmed by the July, 2011 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee.

*‘Light Eternal’*, a study resource on *‘Jews & Judaism: A Statement by the Uniting Church in Australia’* can be obtained by contacting the Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly on (02) 8267 4428 or [rof@nat.uca.org.au](mailto:rof@nat.uca.org.au)



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## Churches Act for Peace in the Holy Land

To read relevant Minutes and Statements from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), please follow the links below:

- WCC 2005 - Minute on economic measures for peace in Israel/Palestine - <http://bit.ly/ruhDj2>
- WCC 2006 - Church leaders in Jerusalem urge World Churches and all Christians to advocate for peace - <http://bit.ly/soWUar>
- The Amman Call 2007- <http://bit.ly/vOQV7h>
- WCC 2008 - Minute on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip - <http://bit.ly/salqp8>
- WCC 2009 - Statement on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory - <http://bit.ly/2OwwaV>
- WCC 2011 – Minute on the Presence and Witness of Christians in the Middle East - <http://bit.ly/v2r2yg>
- WCC 2011 – Resolution on the US veto against the UN Security Council’s resolution condemning Israeli Settlements in the Palestinian territories - <http://bit.ly/uyeAD2>
- NCCA 2010 - 7th Forum Minute Concerning the Middle East & NCCA Executive November 2010 Minute Supporting a vision for the future beyond the current realities for the Palestinian and Jewish peoples - [www.assembly.uca.org.au/prayerforpeace](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/prayerforpeace)

Please note that these two NCCA Statements are to be held together, are not to be reproduced, and not to be quoted out of context. These appear on the Assembly site with the permission of the NCCA.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ON WHAT CHURCH BODIES HAVE DONE IN THIS AREA?

Act for Peace – [www.actforpeace.org.au](http://www.actforpeace.org.au)

EAPPI - [www.ncca.org.au/departments/eappi](http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/eappi)

## Action Taken by the Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly

In July, 2011, the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Standing Committee adopted the following resolutions:

**11.33.02** in response to resolutions of the National Council of Church in Australia and the requests for action made in the Kairos Palestine document, by the Jerusalem Heads of Churches and by the World Council of Churches, invite church members and congregations to consider taking action with the purposes of:

- Encouraging the governments of Israel and Palestine to move more seriously and effectively towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict between them and,
- Encouraging the Australian Government to use its influence more seriously and effectively towards a resumption of peace talks between Israel and Palestine, towards an end of the occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and of the blockade of Gaza, and towards a two-state solution with secure internationally-recognised borders, in accordance with United Nations resolutions;

**11.33.03** reaffirm the Uniting Church’s commitment to the existence, in peace and security, of the State of Israel (Jews and Judaism, 2009 Assembly, point 15);

**11.33.04** reaffirm the Uniting Church’s conviction that “anti-Semitism in all its expressions is an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Jews and Judaism, 2009);



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**11.33.05** endorse the NCCA Executive resolutions of November 2010 Supporting a vision for the future beyond current realities for the Palestinian and Jewish peoples (NCCA 10.11.06);

**11.33.06** on behalf of the Assembly, the national council of the Uniting Church in Australia, resolve to join the boycott of goods produced in the illegal Israeli settlements;

**11.33.09** express support for the 2012 visit of Australian Church Leaders to Palestine and Israel, noting that the Executive Council of Australian Jewry will be invited to contribute to the itinerary of the visit; and express support for the World Council of Churches program Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel.

## Invitation to Members and Congregations

Upon reflection on the situation in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, members and congregations of the Uniting Church in Australia might choose to take action in a number of different ways. Listed below are a number of suggested actions.

1. Hold a special worship service, meeting or forum in your congregation focusing on the request of Palestinian Christians for the world church to take action in support of an end to the occupation and the conflict.
2. Pray regularly for the peace process and for the people of Israel and Palestine.
3. Meet with your local Federal MP to express concern over the lack of resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine and seek support for Australian Government action towards the end of the occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and a two-state solution.
4. Write letters to the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs to express the same.
5. Participate in the annual Week of Peace for Palestine-Israel, using the liturgical resources provided by the World Council of Churches.
6. Invite a speaker on these issues from the Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly or the National Council of Churches in Australia.
7. Contact a local Jewish, Palestinian or activist community group in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth or Sydney, including a range of Jewish and Palestinian groups with diverse views.
8. Support a relief or development project in the West Bank or Gaza, particularly a project that is supported by an Israeli community group or an Australian Jewish community group.
9. Register ongoing interest in further action through contact with the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network via its website, [www.pien.org.au](http://www.pien.org.au)
10. Support a boycott of goods produced in the illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (list of products available at [www.assembly.uca.org.au/prayerforpeace](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/prayerforpeace)). Then:
  - i. Notify the Assembly using the Response Form, or by emailing [prayerforpeace@nat.uca.org.au](mailto:prayerforpeace@nat.uca.org.au)
  - ii. Notify the NCCA at [secretariat@ncca.org.au](mailto:secretariat@ncca.org.au)
  - iii. Notify the Federal Government through Hon. Julie Bishop MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Federal Opposition through the Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hon Tanya Plibersek MP.
  - iv. Notify the Israeli Ambassador.
  - v. Notify the Palestinian Representative.



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## Information Regarding the Boycott of Goods Produced in the Illegal Israeli Settlements

Should your congregation choose to consider option 10 (to support a boycott of goods produced in the illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories), the following two paragraphs will be of interest. These provide perspectives for and against the boycott respectively, and were written from differing points of view. They are provided as a starting point for discussion only.

## Why we should boycott goods produced by Israeli settlements in the West Bank of Palestine

The chief reason for boycotting goods produced in the Israeli settlements is to show that we stand with Christians in Palestine for justice and peace for both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

Requests have been made to Christians to boycott settlement goods in the Kairos Palestine document produced by the thirteen Christian denominations in Palestine, and in resolutions of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches in Australia. Our Palestinian sisters and brothers regard the boycott as a crucial act of solidarity and support for them in their suffering. How can we say no to them?

It's high time the occupation, in place since 1967, came to an end, and the rights of Palestinians to live in their own land with freedom were restored. Ending the occupation serves the interests of both Palestinians and Israelis.

Two other factors are important. One is that the boycott of settlement goods is a peaceful way of expressing our conviction that the occupation should end. The other is that the boycott registers with the Israeli government. Growing international opinion against the occupation moves us closer to a diplomatic and peaceful solution.

## Joining a boycott is not the only way to support the Palestinian people

Joining a boycott would most likely be regarded by the Australian Jewish community as a hostile act. It sees Israel as the only bulwark against any further attempt to exterminate Jews. Christians standing on 'high moral ground' in this situation should remember that they do not come to the Israeli-Palestinian situation with clean hands. Israel exists because the Jews of Europe were on the way to annihilation at the hands of a 'Christian' nation, based on two thousand years of Christian antisemitism and persecution of Jews. Thirty years of UCA-Jewish bridge-building, plus continuous education of our members about the dangers of antisemitic interpretations of scripture, is put at risk by our church's endorsement of a boycott. A Palestinian Christian call for Christians to boycott goods from the settlements is understandable as a symbol of support for them. It does not take into account the Australian context and the hard-won reconciliation between Christians and Jews in this country.

A boycott can only be symbolic. Any boycott of Israeli goods made in the Israeli 'settlements' in the West Bank will most likely have little or no effect on the output and continuing viability of Israeli manufacturers there. If it were effective, it would cost Palestinian workers their jobs. The major source of employment for Palestinians in the



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West Bank is Israeli factories and other businesses.

A positive way for Australian Christians to encourage and support both the Palestinian and Israeli people in their struggle for lasting peace is to offer support to Palestinian-Jewish peace initiatives in Australia. One example is the football team called 'Muju Peace Club'. This is an initiative of Palestinian and Jewish young people in Melbourne, supported by the Newport Islamic Society, Jewish peace groups and schools, and the Western Bulldogs Football Club. Another is Muslim-Jewish Iftar dinners held in synagogues, where Jews and Muslims break the Ramadan fast together.

The best way forward in supporting justice for Palestinians is for Christians to ask Muslims and Jews in our own country how we can be most helpful in their joint efforts for peace in the Middle East. We can start by consulting our local Imam or Rabbi or contacting a local Interfaith Network.

## List of Settlement Products

An up-to-date listing of goods available in Australia which are produced in the illegal settlements in the West Bank are available on the Assembly website -

[www.assembly.uca.org.au/prayerforpeace](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/prayerforpeace)

## List of Churches Throughout the World that have Taken Action

An up-to-date listing of churches that have taken action regarding this issue is available on the Assembly website -

[www.assembly.uca.org.au/prayerforpeace](http://www.assembly.uca.org.au/prayerforpeace)

