

Those who Close their Eyes to Injustices Prolong them

The following statement was authored by six Swedish international church workers and appeared in the Swedish church magazine *Kyrkans Tidning* on December 8th, 2021.

The Church of Sweden General Synod has adopted a decision with the votes 127 against 103 to raise the issue about the application of International Law in Israel and Palestine, including the International Law clauses on apartheid, with international organisations. Several bishops of the Church of Sweden have reacted strongly to this decision. Six church workers and former missionaries, who all have considerable international experience, are perplexed by the one-sidedness of the bishops and by their lack of empathy with the situation of the Palestinians.

We are surprised at the lack of empathy with the circumstances in Israel and Palestine that several of the bishops of the Church of Sweden have expressed in connection with their criticism of the decision by the Church of Sweden General Synod to scrutinise the application of International law in Israel and Palestine, including the clauses in International law on apartheid. Some of us have served for many years as the ambassadors of the Church of Sweden in the Middle East and Africa, in South Africa and in the Holy Land, Israel and Palestine. We all have considerable international experience.

We want to interpret the bishops with good will, and we appreciate their show of care for the Jewish community in Sweden. However, we question the way in which the circumstances of Jews in Sweden are brought together with the responsibility of the State of Israel for the actual reality that applies to the Palestinian people, both in Palestine and in Israel. There is a mix-up in the positions of the bishops that the General Synod of the Church of Sweden has clearly said that it wants to avoid. In the statement by the Ecumenical Committee on the adaption of the document entitled *Guds vägar - om judendom och kristendom* (2001) (God's Ways – on Judaism and Christianity in 2001) it says:

The reasoning of the Committee on this country underlined, in this connection, that the Church of Sweden must strongly reject all arguments which imply that claims to land areas are motivated by historical or religious arguments. Jerusalem and many other holy places in Israel-Palestine are holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims. Claims to these places, as to other land areas, can however not be based on ethically sustainable grounds based on anything but the principles of International Law. The current political actions by the State of Israel should therefore, according to the Committee, obviously be considered in the same way as the actions of other states and should be submitted to the same critical scrutiny. This has no connection with the basic view of the Jewish people or of the Jewish faith. It is not Judaism, nor the Jewish people that are agents in this case, but the State of Israel. It is with great sorrow that the Committee notes the crimes against International Law that currently occur in Israel-Palestine, but this does not touch on the content in this document, just as the document gives no grounds for any different moral judgement on the actions of the State of Israel in comparison that of other states.

We therefore appreciate the decision by the Church of Sweden general Synod to raise the issue about scrutinising the application of International Law in Israel and Palestine from the

perspective of International Law, that is including the clauses in International Law on apartheid, with international organisations. Palestinian Christians have pleaded with us to react to the crimes against International Law that are being committed, including apartheid. Israeli Human Rights Organisations have made investigations under International Law which confirm the presence of apartheid and international inequality between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, particularly on the West Bank and including East Jerusalem and Gaza, but also to some extent in Israel itself. Different judicial systems are being practised with regard to Israeli Jews and Palestinians on the West Bank.

The Israeli organisation Parents Against Child Detention testifies that children's rights and the Child Convention are respected in Israel though not in the Occupied Territories. There children are abducted at night by Israeli Military, who drag them from their beds, handcuff them and force them to wear blindfolds. They are taken to painful interrogations, where they are threatened that their parents may be penalised if they do not admit the alleged crimes. They are imprisoned for a long time. Sometimes the parents do not know where their children are. As a rule, children do not constitute any security threat to Israel. A representative for a Children's' Rights Organisation asked during a webinar: "Why do Israel bother about these nightly raids when they break into homes?" And he continues, "In order to fill people with terror and to break the will to resistance among the Palestinian people."

What we see as the most serious aspect of certain bishops' reactions to the Church of Sweden General Synod decision about International Law is their disregard for the suffering of the Palestinian people. There is obvious care of Jews in Sweden and about the safety and security of Jews in Sweden. Unfortunately, they completely disregard the safety and security of Palestinians in Israel and Palestine. It seems to be incompatible to show solidarity with two people at the same time.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu noted already in 2014 that apartheid was being practiced in the area and that the circumstances for Palestinians were more limited than they had ever been for black South Africans in the South Africa of the apartheid regime. Desmond Tutu said, "Those who close their eyes to injustices prolong them. If you are neutral in situations of oppression, you have in fact chosen the side of the oppressors." We have an expectation that bishops should take responsibility for justice throughout the world. International Law is the impartial ground that must provide guidance in all situations of oppression. Not to consider International Law is an attack on the order of justice throughout the world.

The decision by the Church of Sweden General Synod is in line with the positions taken by several other churches throughout the world, even though the decision by the Church of Sweden is somewhat more cautious.

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