

Rev Dr Anna Karin Hammar's Response to Objection to Swedish Church Motion to Investigate Israel as an Apartheid Regime

“There are many oppressed peoples in the world. The Palestinian people are not the only people to be deprived their human, civil and national rights. Although the Palestinian people might be one of the few people still affected by settler colonialism in the occupation of its territory and surely the only people deemed by experts on international law to experience a regime of apartheid. Taking all this into account - what is it that connects the churches round the world especially close to the Palestinian people?”

Allow me to respond to this question in three ways.

1. The Holy Land has a special place in the history of salvation

Our entire Bible describes the wanderings of people to and fro in the area that we have come to call the Holy Land. The story begins with Abraham, a pilgrim of God and an immigrant who listens to the call to be the people of God on earth. It continues with Sara and Hagar, Rebecca and Miriam, Judith, Hannah and Ruth. And in Mary’s “Yes” to Gabriel, the Angel of God, the mystery is intensified and Godself becomes Human in Jesus Christ. The Holy land is a land, a piece of ground, a place that feels the feet of Jesus, with the light step of a child, with the heavier step of the grown adult. We walk with Christ through various seasons and different geological formations. This place, this land. Here takes place that which we, with a theological word, call the incarnation. Godself becomes a human being and discloses the mystery that no place is without God. The ground itself is a source of power for Jesus, even in his utmost vulnerability. As he falls to the ground in Gethsemane, his courage grows. The ground itself provides power and courage, just as the Palestinian people today speak of *somoud*, of allowing oneself to be so rooted in the ground that perseverance and resilience become the result. Just like the Jewish people, the churches of the world are forever bound up with this place, this piece of ground, this part of the world. That is why the Holy Land touches us deeply. That is why we cannot disengage ourselves completely from what happens to the Palestinian people, from the modern State of Israel and Palestine, because it touches a place that carries the traces of God’s call and God’s mystery of salvation.

A second reason why we care particularly about the Palestinians is this:

2. The Palestinians are the stewards of the Christian heritage in the Holy Land.

The Orthodox Church is the oldest church in the Holy Land. There are many contemporary Orthodox Palestinians who can say, “My family has its roots in the first Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church.” This is just as true as saying that the Gospels have their background in the Jewish faith. And it is equally true that the Palestinian Christians are the stewards and guardians of the history of the Church in the Holy Land. The *am haaretz*, the people of the land, constitutes a continuity of the Holy Land, of which the Churches have been a significant aspect

of the mosaic. This close bond to the place also marks a close bond over time, in which the church history of the world cannot be written without the Palestinian people. Our history as a church begins with a miracle of language in Jerusalem, which recognizes Arabic as well. The first Day of Pentecost is the birthday of the Church throughout the world. Today the Palestinian Christians have diminished in number, but they continue to serve the wider community. The Christian part of the population has decreased because of the impossible conditions of life caused by war, occupation and emigration. It is urgent that we, as churches in the world, give them all imaginable support to continue to be part of the population of the land and the bearer of the Christian history and memory in the Holy land. It is high time to write down their history more carefully so that we might also enable their future.

3. No people is a free people until all people are free.

Nelson Mandela expressed it explicitly, “we know that our freedom is incomplete until the Palestinians are free.” Nelson Mandela repeated his support for the Palestinians on several occasions. “They have the same struggle that we do, for national self-determination.” Every people who has experienced that they have been bereaved of their self-determination can recognize themselves in the situation of the Palestinians. It is sometimes said that the Palestinian conflict is the last colonial conflict. It is not. But the Palestinian people have experienced the colonization of their land. Even though most people today speak of illegal settlements on occupied territory, the English term colony is frequently used about these settlements.

Many people in the world have a history of being colonizers through our rulers and regimes. Also in a country like Sweden, where I come from, we have a history of oppression.. The white book in two thick volumes that the Church of Sweden has produced about its history in relation to the indigenous Sami people is an important step along the way of reconciliation as well as the apology for participation in the atrocities of colonisation. It begins by acknowledging the injustices that have been committed. To acknowledge injustices that have been committed is a necessary first step on every road towards reconciliation. The churches who want to participate in that freedom movement that will lead to the freedom of every people can participate in various ways depending on their history. While we are invited by the Palestinian Christians to show creative resistance to the occupation and as we stand up for the right of the Palestinian refugees to return, we must also work at the same time towards the writing of the history of how the Palestinian people have been deprived of their nation and their land. No people is free until every people is free.

In *Global Kairos for Justice* people around the world join hands with the Palestinian Christians, united in *Kairos Palestine* and the churches of the Holy Land. We do so for different reasons and we are grateful for the brave testimony given in *Cry for Hope* and the *Kairos Palestine Document*. As carriers of the collective memory of the worldwide Church Palestinian Christians cannot be forgotten, unless we despise our own roots.

Many Christians around the world are already influencing the situation of Palestinian Christians. Some for good, while others neglect the unique situation and contribute to further dispossessing the Palestinian people. It is a matter of choice and conversion. To affirm our roots in the Palestinian Christian witness - or to deny them.

May the Triune God help us to choose affirming our roots and Gods indivisible call to a pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in the Care for all of God's Creation.

Anna Karin Hammar
Rev. Dr.
Church of Sweden
Ecumenical coordinator Kairos Palestine - Sweden