

[OVT-013] Recognition that Israel has Violated the International Law Prohibiting Genocide

Source: Presbytery

Committee: Unassigned

Event: 227th General Assembly (2026)

Sponsor: The Redwoods Presbytery

Type: General Assembly Full Consideration

Recommendation

The Presbytery of the Redwoods overtures the 227th (2026) General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:

Condemn the government of Israel's violation of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the war against Gaza that began in 2023.

Encourage Presbyterian lay, ordained members, and the Office of Public Witness to contact members of Congress and the President to urge them to block military sales to Israel until Israel complies with all U.S. laws prohibiting sales of military equipment to countries in violation of international human rights laws, including the prohibition of Genocide.

Encourage members of the Presbyterian Church to refrain from buying products made or distributed by Israeli companies until the PC(USA) determines Israel complies with all international human rights laws, including the prohibition of Genocide.

Stand against all forms of Antisemitism/Anti-Jewish racism and Islamophobia/Anti-Arab racism, condemning both as pernicious forms of evil, dividing and separating us from our interfaith siblings, and stand with those threatened with any harm that inhibits their full participation in the life and liberty of our communities.

Affirm that standing up for basic human rights is not Antisemitism.

Encourage our member congregations to preach and teach on this critical issue.

Publicize this overture's approval on the PC(USA) webpage, and as practical, in other print or digital formats, and encourage congregations to adopt this resolution, or write and affirm one themselves.

Rationale

United Nations declares genocide is an international crime in 1948

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. "Genocide" means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

This definition of Genocide was adopted by the International Criminal Court.

Hamas 2023 attack on Israel

On October 7, 2023, Hamas militias attacked Israeli communities near Gaza's northern border. In ensuing battles 1,195 people were killed, including 816 civilians, and 250 Israeli civilians and soldiers were taken hostage. Hamas's action attacking civilians and taking hostages are prohibited by international law and should be condemned.

South Africa petitions the ICJ to rule that Israel's actions in response to the Hamas attack constitute Genocide

The Gaza Strip ('Gaza'), a narrow strip of land approximately 140 square miles, and home to approximately 2.3 million people, is one of the most densely populated places in the world, almost half of whom are children.

The Israeli military response to the Hamas attack was so intense, lethal, indiscriminate, relentless, murderous, and destructive that, only 83 days after it began, the government of South Africa filed papers in the International Court of Justice, claiming that Israel's actions constituted Genocide. South Africa's petition to the court claimed "Israel has engaged in a large-scale military assault by land, air and sea. The Gaza Strip has been subjected by Israel to what has been described as one of the "heaviest conventional bombing campaigns" in the history of modern warfare. By 29 October 2023 alone, it was estimated that 6,000 bombs per week had been dropped on the tiny enclave." The petition contained an extensive description of deaths, damage, food shortages, destruction of hospitals, and the forcible displacement of 80 per cent of the population.

The submission asserts that Israel's actions are "genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent ... to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group".

The International Court of Justice orders Israel to stop all genocidal actions

On January 26, 2024, the ICJ ruled it is plausible that Israel is committing Genocide against the Palestinian people and Israel is ordered to stop all genocidal actions including killing members of the protected group, causing them serious bodily or mental harm, and imposing living conditions intended to destroy the group. On March 24, 2024, the court ordered Israel to take action to ensure food supplies to the Palestinian population without delay. <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203447>

Human Rights Watch Report Concludes Israel is Committing Genocide

In a December 19, 2024, 185-page report titled "Extermination and Acts of Genocide – Israel

Deliberately Depriving Palestinians in Gaza of Water" Human Rights Watch concluded that, since October 2023, Israeli authorities have deliberately obstructed Palestinians' access to the adequate amount of water required for survival in the Gaza Strip.

Between October 2023 and September 2024, Israeli authorities' actions have deprived the majority of the more than 2 million Palestinians living in Gaza of access to even that bare minimum amount of water that the World Health Organization deems necessary for survival. This has contributed to death and widespread disease. For many in Gaza, much or all the water they have had access to is not suitable for drinking.

Israeli authorities' and forces' actions to deprive the population of Gaza of access to water amount to acts of genocide under the Genocide Convention and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/12/gaza1224web.pdf

Amnesty International Report Concludes Israel is Committing Genocide

In December 5, 2024, in a well-documented 292-page report titled 'You Feel Like You Are Subhuman' --Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza," Amnesty international concluded Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. It states "Our research reveals that, for months, Israel has persisted in committing genocidal acts, fully aware of the irreparable harm it was inflicting on Palestinians in Gaza. ... Its brutal military offensive has killed more that 42,000 Palestinians, including over 13,300 children, and injured over 97,000 more, by October 7, 2024, many of them in direct or deliberately indiscriminate attacks, often wiping out entire multigenerational families...Israel has imposed conditions of life in Gaza that created a deadly mixture of malnutrition, hunger, and diseases, and exposed Palestinians to a slow, calculated death."

The report also notes that "Taking into account the pre-existing context of dispossession, apartheid, and unlawful military occupation in which these acts have been committed, we find one reasonable conclusion: Israel's intent is the physical destruction of the Palestinians in Gaza."

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/8668/2024/en/>

United Nations Special Rapporteur Report Declares Israel is Committing Genocide

On October 1, 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied stated: o The violence that Israel has unleashed against the Palestinians post-7 October is not happening in a vacuum, but is part of a long-term intentional, systematic, State-organized forced displacement and replacement of the Palestinians. This trajectory risks causing irreparable prejudice to the very existence of the Palestinian people in Palestine. Member States must intervene now to prevent new atrocities that will further scar human history. o The Gaza Genocide is a tragedy foretold, and one that risks expanding to other Palestinians under Israeli rule. Since its establishment, Israel has treated the occupied people as a hated encumbrance and threat to be eradicated, subjecting millions of Palestinians, for generations, to everyday indignities, mass killing, mass incarceration, forced displacement, racial segregation and apartheid. Advancing its goal of "Greater Israel" threatens to erase the Indigenous Palestinian population.

Obscured by false Israeli narratives of a war waged in "self-defence", the genocidal conduct of Israel must be viewed within a broader context, as numerous actions (totality of conduct) jointly targeting the Palestinians as such (totality of a people) across the entire territory where they reside (totality of the land), in furtherance of the political ambitions of Israel for sovereignty over the whole of former Mandatory Palestine.

Today, the Genocide of the Palestinians appears to be the means to an end: the complete removal or eradication of Palestinians from the land so integral to their identity, and which is illegally and openly coveted by Israel.

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/genocide-as-colonial-erasure-report-francescaalbanese-01oct24/>

Why Presbyterians Must Speak Out

Presbyterians champion the nonviolent teachings of Jesus, calling for prophetic action against violence, exploitation, and war. To help find solutions to a problem, one must honestly name the problem. This overture asks the Presbyterian Church USA to acknowledge that Israel is committing Genocide against the Palestinian people so that the Church can work nationally and internationally to find ways to address this problem.

Concurrence

Northeast New Jersey Presbytery