



# World Council of Churches

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*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners.*

— Isaiah 61:1

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On the occasion of the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel (WWPPI), I write to acknowledge the many ways member churches of the WCC have sought the things that make for peace with justice in Israel and Palestine and to encourage your awareness of and participation in this significant week of witness and peacebuilding. The WWPPI is an important time for focusing our efforts together in order to amplify our global solidarity.

This has been a terrible year for both Palestinians and Israelis. Fighting between the Israeli military and various Palestinian groups in Gaza filled global headlines for the month of August. Earlier this year, the WCC had raised its voice, expressing grave concern that lack of success in negotiations would lead to both new settlement expansions in the West Bank and to escalations of violence. Although the violence in and around Gaza was terrible, we must not forget that it was preceded by kidnappings, murders and revenge killings and then followed by a series of Israeli announcements that more land would be confiscated and more settlements built. Throughout it all, Israeli security forces detained and imprisoned countless Palestinians, most of them young men, many of them minors.

This year's WWPPI focus on prisoners thus points us to one of the enduring aspects of Israel's ongoing military occupation of Palestine: the detention, arrest, and imprisonment of so many Palestinians. The Palestinian experience of mass incarceration is mirrored in many other minority populations, including African American citizens in the United States. The Palestinian reality, however, is that this is taking place in the context of a 47-year military occupation. The vast majority of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails are political prisoners. They include many human rights workers, civil society leaders, and elected politicians. Some are held for significant periods of time without any trial or the minimum standards of due process under abuses of Israel's laws allowing for "administrative detention." Along with several documented cases of medical neglect and inhumane treatment, these concerns make the mass incarceration of Palestinians by the government of Israel a matter of international law and international concern. The WCC raises its voice on behalf of this vulnerable population, calling for each one to receive proper care and due process leading to a just outcome. We additionally call for all political prisoners—in Israeli prisons and throughout the world—to be released immediately.

Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails are a central concern for political leaders on both sides. We note that Prime Minister Netanyahu's refusal to release a group of prisoners marked the end of the most recent round of negotiations. We have witnessed the hunger strikes by prisoners and the public protests by family members. We have also heard the deep pain of those Israelis who have experienced harm at the hands of some of these prisoners.

It is often easier to look the other way when prisoners are mentioned. As Christians we must remember that Jesus identified himself with prisoners (Matt 25.36), that he proclaimed release to the prisoners (Lk 4.18), and that the earliest followers of Jesus often found themselves in prison (Acts 12.7). The plight of prisoners is a central concern for the global Body of Christ.

Again, my sisters and brothers, I appeal to you to promote participation in this year's WWPPPI. I pray that you will be strengthened in your solidarity and that practical steps will soon be taken for the establishment of a just peace in Palestine and Israel.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Olav Fykse Tveit'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Dr Olav FykseTveit  
General Secretary, World Council of Churches