



## **“Embracing Solidarities through Sharing Stories of Struggles to Resist Empires” - Statement-**

We, the participants of the conference on “Embracing Solidarities through Sharing Stories of Struggles to Resist Empires”, a four day consultation organized by Global Kairos for Asia Pacific Palestine Solidarity (GKAPPS) in collaboration with the Academy for Contextual Theologies in Taiwan (ACTT), from April 27 to 30, 2022, seek to express our radical solidarity with the people in Palestine in their struggles to overcome the decades-long colonial/apartheid regime that deprives them of their fundamental human rights, including the right to life. We, a multi religious group from around 21 countries, also call upon the religious communities and civil society movements in the Asia-Pacific region and around the Globe to act decisively to address the brutal and horrific situations of Nakba that the Palestinians have been facing for more than seven decades.

The conference was a follow up to a one-year study initiated by GKAPPS under the prophetic leadership of the late Prof. Kim Yong Bock.

Our message from the conference is especially addressed to the Palestinian people and the Kairos Movement which has united thousands of Palestinians of their people in active non-violent struggle. It is further addressed to churches around the world which are actively engaged in actions of unity with oppressed Palestinians. We also include the wider social movements in Palestine, and especially the people of Gaza who are often out of reach of everyday occurrences of civil society processes but who bear the brunt of the occupation by their political and social isolation. We also include in our message to all Palestine solidarity Movements around the world, trade unions who have taken the side of the Palestinians through concrete actions of support and camaraderie. We recognize that there are many progressive Jewish groups who abhor the occupation and reject its unjust patterns, and, other faith groups. And, of course, we include the Peace Movements within Israel who fight what is often a lonely battle, and yet, make their own impact at political costs.

The conference listened to the stories of marginalized peoples from different parts of Asia, the Pacific, and Palestine who are engaged in distinct struggles. These stories highlighted the people’s spirit of life as they confront the debilitating powers of the Empires that restrict their freedoms.

The Nakba is not a mere historical catastrophic event, widely attributed to the period of the deliberate ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the land when European Zionist settlers lay the groundwork for their state; rather, Nakba is an ongoing reality for the Palestinians. The Zionist project fulfilled its dream of creating a state in Palestine in 1948 after displacing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their native land. Since then, Palestinian displacement has continued. Palestinians remain trapped in a deepening cycle of violence, humiliation, and despair. The Palestinians suffer from land theft, increased settlements, forcible transfers, demolition and desecration of heritage and holy sites, the “apartheid wall”, checkpoints, an overriding military presence, arbitrary and extra-judicial killings, torture, the denial of fundamental rights, an abysmal rate of child deaths, collective punishment, an abusive military court system, periods of intensive Israeli military violence... and the list of human rights violations does not end. Military brutality has no tangible limits. Israel arrested about 1,300 boys and girls in 2021, and from January to March, 2022 more than 200 children have been detained.

Gaza, with more than two million inhabitants, has been hermetically sealed off by a military blockade of land, air and sea since 2007. It is identified appropriately as an “open air prison”. It has been regularly bombarded by military aircraft, drones and tanks killing thousands of civilians, wounding many times more, making half a million homeless, with the destruction of means of livelihood.

Meanwhile, more than six million Palestinians are stateless refugees living in refugee camps in countries neighboring Palestine - for several generations- since being driven out of their homes. Children in these refugee camps are born as refugees, grow up as refugees and die as refugees. Israel refuses the exercise of their Right of Return, which is enshrined in the Fourth Geneva Convention and UN Resolution 194 passed soon after the Nakba, and which gives them the right to return to Palestine, their country of origin.

Palestinians continue to live in a dark tunnel, repeatedly brutalized and living under long-term military occupation. The various peace processes initiated by Western powers only reinforced the brutal power of the occupying regime. Calls for a just peace have been ignored. Instead, Israel persists with stealing Palestinian land and developing its settlements thereby heightening its military tyranny.

Palestinians have called out to their brothers and sisters around the world as their suffering intensifies. They shed tears as they shout in anguish: “Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action.”

We have reached a crisis of faith. Through the Palestinian “Kairos Document”, Palestinian Christians remind the global Christian communities that this is a time for repentance. Repentance brings us back into the communion of love with everyone who suffers: the prisoners, the wounded, those afflicted with temporary or permanent disabilities, children who cannot live their childhood and each one who mourns a dear one. The communion of love says to every believer in spirit and in truth: “If my sister or brother is a prisoner, I am a prisoner; if her/his home is destroyed, my home is destroyed; when my sister/brother is killed, then I too am killed. We face the same challenges and share in all that has happened and will happen.”

At the heart of Kairos theology is the affirmation that God favours the subjugated against their powerful occupiers, and God defends the cause of those who are dominated, suppressed and kept poor as they claim their rightful dignity, freedom, and economic justice. Kairos expresses the conviction that God is listening to their call for liberation.

God is God of love, and love is a profound statement of justice and hope. Although the ruthless repression escalates unabated, and the increasing Israeli military power refuses to arrive at any peaceful solution, the hope of the Palestinian people remains strong because it is from God. Palestinian theology asserts that “God alone is Good, Almighty and Loving and God’s Goodness will one day be victorious over the evil in which we find ourselves.”

And Palestinian Christians contend that Israel, like all other oppressive regimes, does not just fear the anger of the oppressed. It fears – perhaps even more – the abounding hope of the subjugated people. “Israel knows that its power and impunity are greater when people feel weak and hopeless.”

The God of love is asking the global community: “On whose side are we on?” Are we a reason for hope in the face of hopelessness and thereby fulfilling the gospel task?

GKAPPS is a coalition of social activists, theologians and church leaders who promote the call of Global Kairos for Justice, as a response to the Palestinian people’s struggle against a colonial, apartheid regime that deprives them of their right to life, land, and livelihood. Being challenged by the convivial relationship of Asian religions and faith formations, GKAPPS has grown into an inter-religious/inter-faith solidarity network.

GKAPPS has focused on creating a theological and inter-religious space to link issues of what is often referred to as ‘Nakba-like political happenings in Asia’ alongside the continuing Nakba in Palestine. GKAPPS is conscious that the debilitating hegemony of the Empress over the social, economic, and political life of the diverse oppressed peoples in Asia have a similar dynamic. People’s struggles in Palestine and Asia are not unrelated; rather, they are directed against the same forces, overriding the rights of the people who are kept outside the

constructed totality. History tells us that people in the margins not only negate the totality erected by the empires, but counter pose alternatives, drawing from their painful experience of oppression, and informed by the rich cultural heritages which the excluded possess. To fulfill the critical political function of creating alternatives, we respond to calls for greater solidarity and cooperation among the various people's movements that struggle for justice and self-determination. Solidarity among the movements in Asia is an imperative to forge a critical solidarity with the struggles of the people in Palestine. The urgency of building collective resistance in solidarity with those across the borders has increased with the rapid growth of Christian Zionism, religious nationalism, Islamophobia, and the attacks on democratic space, with a rippling impact on the bizarre forms of economic, cultural/social, and gender marginalization in the Asia Pacific region, including in Palestine.

The sharing of stories during the consultation unraveled a common thread among these struggles, thereby providing possibilities to create space for critical solidarity. GKAPPS identified several issues that need careful attention from churches, civil society movements and governing powers in Asia:

1. Seeking Convergence of Asian Religions for Peace and Life. Unfortunately, religion and faith have become political constructs in Asia with a single objective of providing legitimacy to the prevailing undemocratic, hegemonic regimes. Religious identities and different interpretations are used to nurture a culture of hatred, leading to violence. In this context, it is critical to re-appropriate Asian faith traditions to build solid spiritual foundations for justice, convivial life and the right to self-determination. This means that a creative convergence of spiritualities among West Asian religious communities, transcending and transforming religious communities, their theological doctrines, and religious orders, and their social manifestations are imperative.

2. Political and cultural cohabitation of radical religious nationalists such as Hindutva with Zionism. For the religious fascist forces in Asia, including Hindutva forces in India, militant Buddhist forces in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, Israel has become a rallying point and is projected as a success story for others to follow. They compete with each other in cultivating venomous, hateful languages to demonize the other and to espouse ethnic and religious nationalism. Notwithstanding the differences in the symbols they choose to venerate or vilify, the core dynamics of identity and emotion are identical.

We therefore call upon the secular democratic forces within and outside the church to strengthen a new political process that will ensure the establishment of a secular democratic order in Asian nations.

3. Common Struggles for Eco-justice in Palestine vis-à-vis the Occupation. Struggles of earth are interlinked with the struggles of human freedom. The security of the web of life among all living beings, human and natural, in the land and sea, is being destroyed in terms of the human security of livelihood. The subjecthood of all living beings, including human beings, is demolished by political and military occupation. Besides, control on water and other natural resources has been effectively used to exert political and military control over the Palestinians. These realities are not different in other Asian nations. The poor and the marginalized, including the Dalits and indigenous communities, are deprived of having any access to the resources needed to maintain life. The conference called for urgent intervention from political and civil societies to ensure the right to a decent life for all.

4. Gender-based violence. Most commentators agree that Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip face a triple challenge to establishing their rights: as Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation that control every aspect of their lives; as women living in a society governed by patriarchal customs; and as unequal members of a society subject to discriminatory laws. One aspect of this situation is that women are subjected to violence committed by the Israeli state or its agents, as well as to violence within the family. The experiences of other Asian women are not different. GKAPPS proposes to create solidarity movements between Palestinian and other Asian women in their struggle for the right to life with dignity.

5. Creation of a common platform for the struggles to let children to be children. In several Asian nations, children receive training for criminal activities when they turn five years old; at eight they know how to open cars; at ten they pick pockets; at twelve they are drug couriers. At eighteen, they know too much and are disposed of by syndicates. The mass abduction of indigenous children as an element of Australian Aboriginal policies, and their forced “transfer” and assimilation into settler society, have been described as acts of genocide. Children’s ordeals are further exacerbated in settler-colonial contexts like Palestine, where space is affected by structures of dispossession. The wide spread incarceration of children in the occupied land necessitates greater attention to address the issues with urgency.

6. Boycott Israel’s political economy. Israel has converted itself as the hub of an international security systems market, promoting not only the technologies of personal /state security system and its diverse techniques, but also functioning as a hub of weapons market. The state of Israel sells security/military technologies and hardware to both state and non-state players. It has a major role in the militarization of several Asian nations and is thus a threat to peace. We call upon the nations to stop promoting the economic structures of the Israeli society built on death dealing military hardware. We seek the promotion of life by negating the forces that are grounded in mechanisms of death.

7. Counter Christian Zionism. Many Christian churches in Asia have adopted the ideological and theological notions contained in Christian Zionism, which distorts the Bible and is the rejection of God as the only creator. It promotes racial supremacy, exclusivity and offers validation of the domination of the land of Palestine and the ethnic cleansing of indigenous Palestinians. Christian Zionism legitimizes the ideas of chosen-ness and the Promised Land. Besides, as part of the same project of Zionism, Christian churches have recently been deliberately demonizing the Islamic faith. The weight of Christian Zionism has imposed Christian apathy and indifference on the Palestinian plight. Christian Zionist forces also deceptively promote the so-called “Holy Land Pilgrimage” in Asian churches as a political weapon to create hatred towards Palestinians and deep sympathy towards Israel. In their narrative, the Palestinians are occupiers against the will of God and the Israeli establishment is the subjugated people. We call upon the churches and Christian communities in Asia to radically revisit their theologies that promote Zionism and Islamophobia.

#### 8. Visioning a Social economy in a free Palestine

The root of the crisis is the prevalence of a monopoly capitalist economic order that functions in favor of empires. In place of the economy of exclusion we need to strive for an “Economy of Conviviality-UBUNTU”, of living beings that offer the core social economic security net of basic food, housing, clothing, health care, education and cultural life as well as the natural abode of living beings.

9. Constructing a Peoples Bandung. The Bandung conference of 1955 was the beginning of a new era of freedom and self-determination. As President Sukarno, the host of the Bandung meeting observed, the mature growth of personhood is conditioned by the ability to overcome the bonds of fear, the bonds of poverty and spiritual and intellectual bonds. That liberation is what Bandung aimed at. Bandung, nevertheless, was a gathering of, in the words of Richard Wright, “the despised, the insulted, the disposed, in short the underdogs of human race.” Unfortunately, the political leadership in Asian and African nations killed the spirit of Bandung. The challenge now is to create a people’s Bandung of the dispossessed and despised to align with each other to ensure freedom of all.

A Bandung solidarity network for justice, conviviality, and peace for all peoples must be forged to foster the wholesomeness of life on earth. People’s Bandung should transform the global military technocracy into the shovel of planting trees as an integral part of the web of life for living beings on the garden. It is an opportune time to divest greed from the hearts and household to enhance the passion for love and mutual conviviality. Let our children sing the joy of life with the birds in the sky and at the dances of trees in the garden. Let the healing balm flow like waters of life. Let us write moving poetry so that the twinkling stars in heaven

recite them in the deepest spiritual mood. This is indeed the spiritual communion of all living beings in Bethlehem.

People's Bandung calls us to look beyond the failed nation state model that the empires promote.

Power does not come from the barrel of a gun; nor does peace come from the graveyard of the hundreds and thousands of Palestinian martyrs who have struggled for freedom and justice.

Israel and its allies may be a formidable foe, armed to the teeth, and a politics based on racism, colonialism, and apartheid. A nation's legitimacy requires moral foundations which Israel has not cultivated.

The future will be guaranteed by a spirit of resistance that is nurtured and that thrives. The only way to end the Nakba, Palestinians insist, is to persist with peaceful, yet, non-violent resistance.

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