

FAQs: General Council 44 Annual Meeting Decision and Just Peace in Palestine and Israel

What came to the General Council 44 Annual Meeting for consideration?

The General Council Annual Meeting of October 19, 2024, was asked to consider a proposal that affirmed the application of justice principles to the conflict in Israel and Palestine in such a way that enables the adoption of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) strategies and joins in the consensus of the international human rights communities in recognizing and rejecting Israel's apartheid system.

The proposal, GCE10 Authorizing Action for a Principle-Based Approach,¹ also referred some previous proposals on Israel and Palestine, collectively known as the "regional council proposals," to the General Secretary to help guide the church's response. The proposal also directed the General Secretary to continue to report to the General Council Executive on the advocacy work of the church related to Palestine and Israel including the application of the principles. This proposal was passed.

What is the General Council saying in passing this proposal?

In passing this proposal, the General Council is affirming their ongoing commitment to making decisions on social justice issues, in this case the conflict in Israel and Palestine, through a principle-based approach.

And, they are concluding that the application of principles in this case, leads the church towards action in ways that previous policy decisions had restricted—namely the fuller use of BDS strategies and the recognition of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories as apartheid. The passing of this proposal more clearly aligns the advocacy of The United Church of Canada with the consistent and repeated calls of its partners in the region.

What is a principles-based approach to justice?

As the situation on the ground changes often and quickly, it's become clear that one concrete organizational policy position, addressing a particular time related to an issue of justice or peace, quickly becomes unresponsive to needs of partners or the timeliness of future moments.

In 2022, at General Council 44, the report of a Task Group into Just Peace, GCE04 Just Peace in Palestine and Israel,² asked the church to consider using a principles-based approach to its justice work, including engagement in Palestine and Israel, and suggested several principles that could be applied in determining policy statements and responses to concrete requests from partners or other bodies. The proposal, which did not ask the church to take particular actions

¹ Found at commons.united-church.ca / Governance / 44th General Council / 2024-10 Annual Meeting / Proposals.

² Found at commons.united-church.ca / Governance / 44th General Council / 2024-10 Annual Meeting / Background Documentation.

beyond applying this principle-based approach on an ongoing basis, did not pass. It was postponed definitely until the implementation of GCE03, which are the principles that TICIF was asked to develop. GCE03 did pass at GC in 2022.

GCE03 Principle-Based Approach to Justice Work³ mandated the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee (TICIF) with developing principles for the October 2023 annual meeting of General Council 44. The principles were passed “in principle” by the annual meeting, which authorized their application. The General Council requested that revised principles (based on learning from applying the current principles) be brought to the 45th General Council (2025) for consideration and possible full adoption.

The principles that have been developed speak to the decolonizing approach into which the church is living. They provide a framework for the church, including staff, to examine and respond to justice issues in a timely matter, including to calls from partners, while staying faithful to overarching principles of the denomination.

What are the “Regional Council” proposals?

At the same meeting (2022) in which the church began to pursue a principles-based approach to social justice, the General Council postponed six “regional council” proposals related to just peace in Palestine and Israel. Six proposals were presented to their respective regional councils and transmitted to General Council 44 in 2022. These proposals drew from a Christian Palestinian initiative, Kairos Palestine, that urged the Christian community worldwide to “act justly and speak the truth” about Israeli policies and practices impacting Palestinian rights under the occupation and related to the blockade of Gaza.

The six regional council proposals (CS01, SW09, FSL01, PM02, RC1501, SW02)⁴ were similar in wording and asked the church to take particular actions in relation to Palestine and Israel, such as:

- a. Boycott, divestment, sanctions (BDS), addressed as appropriate to the membership of The United Church of Canada and/or the Government of Canada;
- b. Identifying the actions of the government of Israel in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territories as apartheid;
- c. Responding to the Kairos Palestine document, “Cry of Hope.”

Also addressed in these proposals, were education on issues related to just peace in Palestine and Israel (this is ongoing) and education on addressing antisemitism within the United Church (this is work directed by the 44th General Council in 2022 and is continuing).

³ Found at commons.united-church.ca / Governance / 44th General Council / 2022 Gatherings / Proposals / Embolden Justice.

⁴ Found at commons.united-church.ca / Governance / 44th General Council / 2024-10 Annual Meeting / Background Documentation.

Why is the United Church addressing issues of peace in Palestine and Israel?

The United Church of Canada has a long history of responding to issues of injustice in Canada and around the globe, including to requests from global partners for accompaniment and solidarity. The United Church speaks about a range of peace and justice concerns, and is actively engaged in responding to calls from partners in Colombia, Philippines, and in the Korean Peninsula, as well as Palestine and Israel.

The ongoing occupation of Palestinian Territories has been a critical part of the engagement of the church. Despite efforts by governments, faith communities and non-governmental organizations, peace was not present in Israel nor the Occupied Palestinian Territories, even before the current war.

What does it mean to talk about “just peace” in Palestine and Israel?

The idea of a just peace implies that peace is linked to the promise of justice. It is widely [recognized](#) that peace and justice are connected, and this is reflected in international law and United Nations (UN) deliberations and practice.

In the context of the current war, it means not only a ceasefire but work to addressing the underlying cause of the decades long conflict in Israel and Palestine, which includes ending the ongoing Occupation of the Palestinian Territories.

Has the church consistently responded to partner calls?

The United Church strives to live out principles of partnership wherein the church is responsive to calls from its global partners. In the case of Palestine and Israel, there are three key areas in which the United Church’s policies had diverged from what partners in Palestine and Israel and the global ecumenical community consistently request:

- a. whether Israel’s policies and practices towards Palestinians constitute apartheid according to international law;
- b. recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, and
- c. adoption of economic and other measures of non-violent resistance against the Israeli occupation.

In part to explore this divergence, the United Church’s Just Peace Task Group began to work in 2019, engaging in research and consulting with diverse voices both in the Middle East region and in Canada. The group produced a report entitled “In Support of Just Peace in Palestine and Israel: A Call to Costly Solidarity,”⁵ which the church’s 44th General Council received (2021).

The proposal just approved by the GC44 annual meeting of October 2024 addresses this previous divergence related to point a) and point c) above.

⁵ Found at commons.united-church.ca / Governance / General Council Executive / GC43 Executive / Meeting Documents / 2021-11-19-20 / Just Peace Task Group Report.

How does the United Church promote “Just Peace” without lapsing into antisemitism, or anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudices?

Given the presence of antisemitism and anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudices in church and society, we need to always be vigilant. Even in the presence of the current war, we still believe peace between Israelis and Palestinians is possible. We also believe we have a role to play among religious communities in overcoming antisemitism and other forms of racism and prejudice. The United Church of Canada has zero tolerance for antisemitism and all forms of racism.

What is antisemitism?

“Literally meaning ‘opposed to Semites’ (i.e., Jews, Arabs and other Semitic peoples); usually used to mean hatred of Jews. The term was invented in Germany in the late 19th Century to give hatred of Jews a scientific ring in the context of a pseudoscientific study of the human races” (Just Peace report, p. 20).

Why does the United Church use the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism as a resource in considering antisemitism instead of the International Holocaust Remembrance Association’s (IHRA) definition, which is supported by the Government of Canada and many Canadian Jewish organizations?

The March 2021 [Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism](#) (JDA) responds to “the IHRA definition,” the document that was adopted by the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#) (IHRA) in 2016. Because the IHRA definition is open to different interpretations, it has caused confusion and generated controversy, hence weakening the fight against antisemitism. Jerusalem Declaration proponents have offered a clearer core definition and a coherent set of guidelines. They hope this will be helpful for monitoring and combating antisemitism, as well as for educational purposes. They propose their non-legally binding declaration as an alternative to the IHRA definition.

The United Church of Canada’s Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee (TICIF) reviewed the Jerusalem Declaration’s definition of antisemitism and recommended that the Just Peace Task Group consider its use.

How has the United Church responded to the war in Gaza?

You can visit the [United Church website](#) to see the list of actions we’ve been taking regarding this current crisis since October 7, 2023. As well as contributing to several emergency appeals for partners in the region, United Church people across the nation are engaging their MPs in conversation, showing up to protests and pilgrimages, and holding events that foster action and understanding of the ongoing conflict in the region. We continue to join others of goodwill in ecumenical and interfaith partnerships to advocate with the Canadian and United States governments.

[In an act of pilgrimage](#) and in solidarity with partners in Palestine and Israel, leadership from several KAIROS Canada member denominations and church agencies built on community [Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimages](#) held throughout March, April, and May 2024 by walking to Parliament Hill on May 22, where they held a prayer vigil and a press conference. They also met with MPs and

government officials from key portfolios. Palestinian-Canadian Christians also recounted the experiences of Palestinians in Gaza and urged the Canadian government to uphold human rights and fully comply with international law.

Before the current war, in April 2023, the Moderator travelled to Ottawa with church leaders from the Evangelical Lutheran, Anglican, and Presbyterian churches in Canada to bring attention to the worsening situation in the Holy Land. We asked Members of Parliament to take seriously the concerns of Palestinians living under increasingly oppressive conditions in the Occupied Territories and to urge Canadian political and diplomatic engagement in a just and lasting peace for all in the Holy Land.

Throughout this current war, the Moderator and General Secretary have sought to hold the Canadian government to account for its lack of action to deter a genocide of the people of Gaza, and repeatedly have written the Prime Minister to call for action on

1. an immediate and sustained ceasefire
2. an immediate flow of life saving food, water, aid, fuel and humanitarian assistance
3. the release of all captives
4. an end to all arms transfers to Israel
5. an end of occupation so a just peace can begin

Why hasn't the United Church focused on the circumstances of Christians elsewhere in the Middle East? What about Christians in Egypt or Syria?

Together with churches in Canada and around the world, the United Church has called on governments in the Middle East to ensure the safety and security of all people living in conflict areas like Syria, especially vulnerable and minority groups, including Christians.

The United Church is a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC), which actively supports Christians throughout the Middle East. We are also an active partner with the Middle East Council of Churches, which represents many Christian communities in the region. Through WCC, the United Church continues to advocate and support advocacy and accompaniment to partners in the Middle East, including in Syria and Lebanon.

The United Church of Canada also continues to make available opportunities and support to congregations who are willing to offer protection to refugees in the form of resettlement through refugee sponsorship under its Sponsorship Agreement with the Government of Canada. For more information on refugee sponsorship, see the United Church's [Sponsor a Refugee](#) page.