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**A moment of truth:  
A word of faith and hope from the heart of Palestinian suffering**

**Introduction**

We, a group of Christian Palestinians, after prayer, reflection and an exchange of opinion, cry out from within the suffering in our country, under the Israeli occupation, with a cry of hope in the absence of all hope, a cry full of prayer and faith in a God ever vigilant in His divine providence for all the inhabitants of this land. Inspired by the mystery of God's love for all, the mystery of His divine presence in the history of all peoples and, in a particular way, in the history of our country, we proclaim our word based on our Christian faith and our sense of Palestinian belonging – a word of faith, hope and love.

**Why now?** Because today we have reached a dead end in the tragedy of the Palestinian people. The decision-makers content themselves with managing the crisis rather than committing themselves to the serious task of finding a way to resolve it. The hearts of the faithful are filled with pain and with questioning: Faced with this reality, what is the international community doing? What are the political leaders in Palestine, in Israel and in the Arab world doing? What is the Church doing? The problem is not just a political one. It is a policy in which human beings are destroyed, and this must be of concern to the Church.

We address ourselves to our brothers and sisters, members of our Churches in this land. We call out as Christians and as Palestinians to our religious and political leaders, to our Palestinian society and to the Israeli society, to the international community, and to our brothers and sisters, Christian faithful in the Churches around the world .

**1. The reality**

1-1 *“They say: ‘Peace, peace’ when there is no peace”* (Jer. 6:14). These days, everyone is speaking about peace in the Middle East and the peace process. So far, however, these are simply words; the reality is one of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, deprivation of our freedom and all that results from this situation:

1-1-1 The separation wall erected on Palestinian territory, a large part of which has been confiscated for this purpose, has turned our towns and villages into prisons, separating them from one another, making them dispersed

and divided cantons. Gaza, especially after the cruel war Israel launched against it during December 2008 and January 2009, continues to live in inhuman conditions, under permanent blockade and cut off from the other Palestinian territories .

1-1-2 Israeli settlements ravage our land in the name of God and in the name of force, controlling our natural resources, including water and agricultural land, thus depriving hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, and constituting an obstacle to any political solution.

1-1-3 Reality is the daily humiliation to which we are subjected at the military checkpoints, as we make our way to jobs, schools or hospitals.

1-1-4 Reality is the separation between members of the same family, making family life impossible for thousands of Palestinians, especially where one of the spouses in a couple does not have an Israeli identity card.

1-1-5 Religious liberty is severely restricted; the freedom of access to the holy places is denied under the pretext of security measures. Jerusalem and her holy places are out of bounds for many Christians and Muslims from the West Bank and Gaza. Even Jerusalemites face restrictions during the religious feasts. Our Arab clergy are regularly barred from entering Jerusalem .

1-1-6 The refugees are also part of our reality. Most of them are still living in camps under difficult circumstances. They are the ones who are waiting for their return, generation after generation. What will be their fate?

1-1-7 And the prisoners? The thousands of prisoners languishing in Israeli prisons are part of our reality. The Israelis move heaven and earth to gain the release of one prisoner, and those thousands of Palestinian prisoners, when will have they their freedom?

1-1-8 Jerusalem is the heart of our reality. She is, at the same time, symbol of peace and sign of conflict. While the separation wall divides Palestinian neighbourhoods, Jerusalem continues to be emptied of her Palestinian citizens, Christians and Muslims. Their identity cards are confiscated and with the loss of these documents their right to remain in Jerusalem is annulled. Their homes are demolished or expropriated. Jerusalem, city of reconciliation, has become a city of discrimination and exclusion, a source of struggle rather than peace .

1-2 Also part of this reality is the Israeli disregard of international law and international resolutions, as well as the paralysis of the Arab world and the international community in the face of this contempt. Human rights are violated and despite the various reports of local and international human rights' organizations, the injustice continues.

1-2-1 Palestinians within the State of Israel, although they are citizens and have the rights and obligations of citizenship, still have suffered a historical injustice and still suffer from discrimination policies. They too are waiting to enjoy full rights and to be treated equally with all other citizens in the state.

1-3 Emigration is another element in our reality. The absence of any vision or spark of hope for peace and freedom pushes young people, both Muslim and Christian, to emigrate. Thus the land is deprived of its most important and richest resource – educated youth. The shrinking number of Christians, in particular in Palestine, is one of the dangerous consequences of this conflict and of the local and international paralysis and failure to find a comprehensive solution to the problem.

1-4 Notwithstanding all this, we are aware of Israel's claim that what is happening is self-defence. We also recognize a feeling of fear and insecurity that envelopes Israeli society. This leads to the continuation of the occupation, collective punishment and all the other forms of reprisals against the Palestinians. In our opinion, this vision is a reversal of reality. Yes, there is Palestinian resistance to the occupation. However, if there were no occupation, there would be no resistance, no fear and no insecurity. This is what we understand. We call on the Israelis to abandon their fear and to end the occupation. Then they will see a new world in which there is no fear and no threat but rather security, justice and peace.

1-5 The Palestinian response to this reality was diverse. Some responded through negotiations: that was the official position of the Palestinian Authority, but it did not advance the peace process. Some political parties followed the way of resistance. They, too, did not achieve anything. Rather, Israel used this as a pretext to accuse the Palestinians of being terrorists and was able to distort the real nature of the conflict, presenting it as an Israeli war against Palestinian terrorism, rather than an Israeli occupation faced by a Palestinian resistance aiming at ending it.

1-5-1 The tragedy worsened with the internal conflict among Palestinians themselves, and with the separation of Gaza from the rest of the Palestinian territory. It is noteworthy that, even though the division is among Palestinians themselves, the international community bears an important responsibility for it since it refused to deal positively with the will of the Palestinian people expressed in the outcome of democratic and legal elections in 2006.

1-6 Religion has been misused. In the name of God, the Israeli settlers are claiming the land, and they fight and kill the Palestinians for it. In the name of God also, some Palestinian parties make use of military resistance to put an end to occupation and get back the land. Thus, religion and faith in God have become a factor of death and hatred instead of being a source of life for all human beings.

Again, we repeat and proclaim that our Christian word in the midst of all this, in the midst of our catastrophe, is a word of faith, hope and love.

## **2. A word of faith**

### **We believe in God, a good and just God**

2-1 We believe in God, Creator of the universe and of humanity. We believe in a good and just God, who loves each one of his creatures. We believe that every human being is created by God in His image and likeness and that every one's dignity is derived from the dignity of the Almighty One. We believe that this dignity is one and the same in each and all of us. This means for us, here and now, in this land in particular, that God created us not so that we might engage in strife and conflict but rather that we might come and know and love one another, and together build up the land in love and mutual respect.

2-1-1 We believe also in God's eternal Word, His only Son, Jesus Christ, whom he sent as the Saviour of the world.

2-1-2 We believe in the Holy Spirit, who accompanies the Church and all humanity on their journey. It is the Spirit that helps us to understand Holy Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, showing their unity, here and now. The Spirit makes manifest the revelation of God to humanity in the past, in the present and in the future .

### **How do we understand the Word of God?**

2-2 We believe that God has spoken to humanity, here in our country: *"Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds"* (Heb. 1:1-2)

2-2-1 We, Christian Palestinians, believe, like all Christians throughout the world, that Jesus Christ came in order to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and in his light and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we read the Holy Scriptures, meditating them and interpreting them just as Jesus Christ interpreted them for the two disciples on their

way to Emmaus. As it is written in the Gospel according to Saint Luke: *"Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures"* (Lk 24:27)

2-2-2 Our Lord Jesus Christ came, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was near. He provoked a revolution in the life and faith of all humanity. He came with *"a new teaching"* (Mk 1:27), casting a new light on the Old Testament, on the themes that relate to our Christian faith and our daily lives, themes such as the promises, the election, the people of God and the land. We believe that the Word of God is a living Word, casting a particular light on each period of history, manifesting to Christian believers what God is saying today and not only what God might have said in the distant past. For this reason, it is not permitted to transform the Word of God into letters of stone that pervert the love of God and His providence in the life of both peoples and individuals. This is precisely the error in fundamentalist Biblical interpretation that brings us death and destruction when the Word of God is petrified and transmitted from generation to generation as a dead letter. This dead letter is used as a weapon in our present history in order to deprive us of our rights in our own land.

### **Our land has a universal vocation**

2-3 We believe that our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land. The promise of the land was never a program for a political appropriation but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. It was the initiation of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

2-3-1 God sent the patriarchs, the prophets and the apostles to this land so that they might carry forth a universal mission to the world. Today we constitute three religions in this land, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Our land is the land of God, as is the case with all countries in the world. It is holy inasmuch as God is present in it, for God alone is holy and sanctifier. It is the duty of those of us who live here, to respect the will of God for this land. It is our duty to liberate it from the evil of war. It is God's land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love. This is indeed possible. God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we only would desire it, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God's land: *"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it"* (Ps. 24:1).

2-3-2 Our presence in this land, as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, is not accidental but rather deeply

rooted in the history and geography of this land, resonant with the connectedness of any other people to the land it lives in. It was an injustice when we were driven out. The West sought to make amends for what Jews had endured in the countries of Europe, but it made amends on our account and in our land. They tried to correct an injustice and the result was a new injustice.

2-3-3 Furthermore, we know that certain theologians in the West try to attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights. Thus, "the promises of God" made to us, according to their interpretations, have become a menace to our very existence. The "good news" in the Gospel itself has become "a harbinger of death" for us. We call on these theologians to deepen their reflection on the Word of God and to rectify their interpretations so that they might see in the Word of God a source of life for all peoples.

2-3-4 Our connectedness to this land is existential. It is not an ideological or a theological question only. It is a matter of life and death. There are those who understand us and those who do not understand us or insist on not understanding us, defining us as enemies only because we declare that we want to live as free people in our land. We suffer from the occupation of our land because we are Palestinians. Certain theologians want us to suffer for our faith because we are Christians. Faced with this, our task is to safeguard the Word of God as a source of life and not of death, so that "the good news" remains what it is, "good news" for us and for all. In face of those who use the Bible to threaten our existence as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, we renew our faith in the Bible because we know that the Word of God can not be the source of our destruction.

2-4 Therefore, we declare that any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, transform religion into human ideology and strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth.

2-5 We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from the teaching of the Church, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image

in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice.

2-5-1 Thus, when we raise our voice to call for the end of the occupation, we seek not only to give back to the Palestinians their violated humanity and humiliated dignity but also to liberate the Israelis from the violence of the occupation they impose on the Palestinians.

### **3. Hope**

3-1 Despite the lack of even a glimmer of positive expectation, our hope remains strong. The present situation does not promise any quick solution or the end of the occupation that is imposed on us. Yes, the initiatives, the conferences, visits and negotiations have multiplied, but they have not been followed up by any change in our situation and suffering. Even the new US position that has been announced by President Obama, with a manifest desire to put an end to the tragedy, has not been able to make a change in our reality. The clear Israeli response, refusing any solution, leaves no room for positive expectation. Despite this, our hope remains strong, because it is from God. God alone is good, almighty and loving and His goodness will one day be victorious over the evil in which we find ourselves. As Saint Paul said: *"If God is for us, who is against us? (...) Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long" (...) For I am convinced that (nothing) in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God"* (Rom. 8:31, 35, 36, 39).

#### **What is the meaning of hope?**

3-2 Hope within us means first and foremost our faith in God and secondly our expectation, despite everything, for a better future. Thirdly, it means not chasing after illusions – we realize that release is not close at hand. Hope is the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble, and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us. From this vision derives the strength to be steadfast, remain firm and work to change the reality in which we find ourselves. Hope means not giving in to evil but rather standing up to it and continuing to resist it. We see nothing in the present or future except ruin and destruction. We see the upper hand of the strong, the growing orientation towards racist separation and the imposition of laws that deny our existence and our dignity. We see confusion and division in the Palestinian position. If, despite all this, we do resist this reality today and work hard, perhaps the destruction that looms on the horizon may not come upon us.

### **A few signs of hope**

3-3 The Church in our land, her leaders and her faithful, despite her weakness and her divisions, does show certain signs of hope. Our parish communities are vibrant and most of our young people are active apostles for justice and peace. In addition to the individual commitment, our various Church institutions make our faith active and present in service, love and prayer.

3-3-1 Among the signs of hope are the local centres of theology, with a religious and social character. They are numerous in our different Churches. The ecumenical spirit, even if still hesitant, shows itself more and more in the meetings of our different Church families .

3-3-2 We can add to this the numerous meetings for inter-religious dialogue, Christian–Muslim dialogue, which includes the religious leaders and a part of the people. Admittedly, dialogue is a long process and is perfected through a daily effort as we undergo the same sufferings and have the same expectations. There is also dialogue among the three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as different dialogue meetings on the academic or social level. They all try to breach the walls imposed by the occupation and oppose the distorted perception of human beings in the heart of their brothers or sisters.

3-3-3 One of the most important signs of hope is the perseverance of the generations and the continuity of memory, which does not forget the "Nakba" (catastrophe) and its significance. This land is our land and it is incumbent upon us to defend it and reclaim it. Likewise significant is the developing awareness among many Churches throughout the world and their desire to know the truth about what is going on here.

3-3-4 In addition to all that we have mentioned, we see a determination among many to overcome the resentments of the past and to be ready for reconciliation once justice has been restored. Public awareness of the need to restore political rights to the Palestinians is increasing, and Jewish and Israeli voices, advocating peace and justice, are raised in support of this with the approval of the international community. True, these forces for justice and reconciliation have not yet been able to transform the situation of injustice, but they have their influence and may shorten the time of suffering and hasten the time of reconciliation.

### **The mission of the Church**

3-4 Our Church is a human church that prays and serves. This prayer and service is prophetic, bearing the voice of God in the present and future. Everything that happens in our land, everyone who lives there, all the pains and hopes, all the injustice and all the efforts to stop this

injustice, are part and parcel of the prayer of our Church and the service of all her institutions. Thanks be to God that our Church raises her voice against injustice despite the fact that some desire her to remain silent, closed in her religious devotions.

3-4-1 The mission of the church is prophetic, to speak the Word of God courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events. If she does take sides, it is with the oppressed, to stand alongside them, just as Christ our Lord stood by the side of each poor person and each sinner, calling them to repentance, life, and the restoration of the dignity bestowed on them by God and that no one has the right to strip away.

3-4-2 The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, peace and dignity. Our vocation as a living Church is to bear witness to the goodness of God and the dignity of human beings. We are called to pray and to make our voice heard when we announce a new society where human beings believe in their own dignity and the dignity of their adversaries. True, we live under occupation and demand that our adversaries stop the injustices that derive from them, but at the same time, we see them as human beings, on whom God has bestowed dignity deriving from His own dignity just as God has on us.

3-4-3 Our Church points to the Kingdom, which cannot be tied to any earthly kingdom. Jesus said before Pilate that he was indeed a king but *"my kingdom is not from this world"* (Jn 18:36). Saint Paul says: *"The Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Rom.14:17). Therefore, religion cannot favour or support any political regime over another, but must rather promote human dignity. It must exert every effort to purify regimes where human beings suffer injustice and human dignity is violated. The Kingdom of God on earth is not dependent on any political orientation, for it is greater and more inclusive than any particular political system.

3-4-4 Jesus Christ said: *"The Kingdom of God is among you"* (Luke 17:21). This Kingdom that is present among us and in us is the extension of the mystery of salvation. It is the presence of God among us and our sense of that presence in everything we do and say. It is in this divine presence that we shall do what we can until justice is achieved in this land .

3-4-5 The cruel circumstances in which the Palestinian Church has lived and continues to live have required the Church to clarify her faith and to identify her vocation better. We have studied our vocation and have come to know it better in the midst of suffering and pain: today, we bear the strength of love rather than that of

revenge, a culture of life rather than a culture of death. This is a source of hope for us, for the Church and for the world.

3-5 The Resurrection is the source of our hope. Just as Christ rose in victory over death and evil, so too we are able, as each inhabitant of this land is able, to vanquish the evil of war. We will remain a witnessing, steadfast and active Church in the land of the Resurrection.

#### **4. Love**

##### **The commandment of love**

4-1 Christ our Lord said: *"Just as I have loved you, you also should love another"* (Jn 13:34). He has already showed us how to love and how to treat our enemies. He said: *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous (...) Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matt. 5:45-47). Saint Paul also said: *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil"* (Rom. 12:17). And Saint Peter said: *"Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called"* (1 Pet. 3:9).

##### **Resistance**

4-2 This word is clear. Love is the commandment of Christ our Lord to us and it includes both friends and enemies. This must be clear when we find ourselves in circumstances where we must resist evil of whatever kind .

4-2-1 Love is seeing the face of God in every human being. Every person is my brother or my sister. However, seeing the face of God in everyone does not mean accepting evil or aggression on their part. Rather, this love seeks to correct the evil and stop the aggression. The injustice of one people towards another is an evil that must be resisted, this being the condition of the Palestinian people living under the injustice of Israeli occupation. This is an evil and a sin that must be resisted and removed. Primary responsibility rests on the perpetrators of the injustice; they must liberate themselves from the evil that is in them and the injustice they have imposed on their brothers and sisters. Responsibility lies also with the international community, if international law regulates relations among peoples today. Finally responsibility is that of the very people under occupation. Christian love invites us to resist the occupation. However, love puts an end to evil without walking in the ways of evil or violence.

4-2-2 When we review the history of the nations, we see many wars and much resistance to war by war, to violence by violence. The Palestinian people has gone the way of the peoples, particularly in the first stages of its struggle with the Israeli occupation. However, it also engaged in peaceful struggle, especially during the first Intifada. We recognize that all peoples must find a new way in their relations with each other and the resolution of their conflicts. The ways of force must give way to the ways of peace. This applies above all to the peoples that are militarily strong, mighty enough to impose their injustice on the weaker .

4-2-3 We say that our option as Christians in the face of the Israeli occupation is to resist. Resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as its logic. It is thus a creative resistance for it must find human ways that engage the humanity of the enemy. The vision of the dignity of God in the face of the enemy means taking up positions in the light of this vision of active resistance to stop the injustice and oblige the perpetrator end his aggression and thus achieve the desired goal, which is getting back the land, freedom, dignity and independence.

4-2-4 Christ our Lord has left us an example we must imitate. We must resist evil but he taught us that we cannot resist evil with evil. This is a difficult commandment, particularly when the enemy is determined to impose himself and deny our right to remain here. It is a difficult commandment yet it alone can stand firm in the face of the clear declarations of the occupation authorities that refuse our existence and the many excuses these authorities use to continue imposing occupation upon us.

4-2-5 Resistance to the evil of occupation is integrated, then, within this Christian love that refuses evil and corrects it. It resists evil in all its forms with methods that enter into the logic of love and draw on all energies to make peace. We can resist through civil disobedience. We do not resist with death but rather through respect of life – our lives and the lives of our opponents also. We respect and have a high esteem for all those who have given their life for our nation. Despite this, we say: Palestine today needs us to live for her, not to die for her. Resistance must respect the humanity of the self and the humanity of the other, in obedience to the Word of God and the commandment of Christ our Lord .

4-2-6 Palestinian civil organizations, as well as international organizations, NGOs and certain religious institutions call on individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance.

These advocacy campaigns must be carried out with courage, openly and sincerely proclaiming that their object is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice. The aim is to free both peoples from extremist positions of the different Israeli governments, bringing both to justice and reconciliation. In this spirit and with this dedication we will eventually reach the longed-for resolution to our problems, as indeed happened in South Africa and with many other liberation movements in the world.

4-3 Through our love, we will overcome injustices and establish foundations for a new society both for us and for our opponents. Our future and their future are one. Either the cycle of violence that destroys both of us or peace that will benefit both. We call on Israel to give up its injustice towards us, not to twist the truth of reality of the occupation by pretending that it is a battle against terrorism. The roots of "terrorism" are in the human injustice committed and in the evil of the occupation. These must be removed if there be a sincere intention to remove "terrorism". We call on the people of Israel to be our partners in peace and not in the cycle of interminable violence. Let us resist evil together, the evil of occupation and the infernal cycle of violence.

### **5. Our word to our brothers and sisters**

5-1 All of us, Palestinians and Israelis, leaders and citizens, face a way that is blocked and a future that promises only woe. As of today, we have all failed in accomplishing what we seek, an end to the occupation, freedom and independence for the Palestinians and stability, security and peace for both Palestinians and Israelis.

5-2 Our word to all our Christian brothers and sisters is a word of hope, patience and steadfastness. Our word is that all of us in this land carry a message and we will continue to carry it despite the thorns, despite blood and daily difficulties. We place our hope in God, who will grant us relief in His own time. At the same time, we continue to act in concord with God and God's will, building, resisting evil and bringing closer the day of justice and peace.

5-3 We say to our Christian brothers and sisters: This is a time for repentance. Repentance brings us back into the communion of love with everyone who suffers, the prisoners, with the wounded, those afflicted with temporary or permanent handicaps, the children who cannot live their childhood, each one crying over a dear one. The communion of love says to every believer in spirit and in truth: if my brother is a prisoner I am a prisoner; if his home is

destroyed, my home is destroyed; when my brother is killed, then I too am killed. We face the same challenges and share in all that has happened and will happen. Perhaps, as individuals or as heads of Church, we were silent when we should have raised our voices to condemn the injustice and share in the suffering. This is a time of repentance for silence, indifference, lack of communion, either because we did not persevere in our mission in this land and abandoned it, or because we did not think and do enough to reach a new and integrated vision and remained divided, contradicting our witness and weakening our word. Repentance for our concern with our institutions, sometimes at the expense of our mission, thus silencing the prophetic voice given by the Spirit to the Churches.

5-4 We call on Christians to remain steadfast in this time of trial, just as we have throughout the centuries, through the changing succession of states and governments. Be patient, steadfast and full of hope so that you might fill the heart of every one of your brothers or sisters who shares in this same trial with hope. *"Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you"* (1 Pet. 3:15). Be active and, provided this conforms to love, participate in any sacrifice that resistance asks of you to overcome our present travail ..

5-5 Our numbers are few but our message is great and important. Our land is in urgent need of love. Our love is a message to the Muslim and to the Jew, as well as to the world.

5-5-1 Our message to the Muslims is a message of love and of living together and a call to reject fanaticism and extremism. It is also a message to the world that Muslims are neither to be stereotyped as the enemy nor caricatured as terrorists but rather to be lived with in peace and engage with in dialogue.

5-5-2 Our message to the Jews tells them: we lived in the past without fighting one another. Even though we have fought one another in the recent past and still struggle today, we are able to love and live together. We can organize our political life, with all its complexity, according to the logic of this love and its power, after ending the occupation and establishing justice.

5-5-3 The word of faith says to anyone engaged in political activity: human beings were not made for hatred. It is not permitted to hate, neither is it permitted to kill or to be killed. The culture of love is the culture of accepting the other. Through it we perfect ourselves and the foundations of society are established .

## **6. Our word to the Churches of the world**

6-1 Our word to the Churches of the world is firstly a word of gratitude for the solidarity you have shown toward us in word, deed and presence among us. It is a word of praise for the many Churches and Christians who support the right of the Palestinian people for self determination. It is a message of solidarity with those Christians and Churches who have suffered because of their advocacy for law and justice .

However, it is also a call to repentance; to revisit fundamentalist theological positions that support certain unjust political options with regard to the Palestinian people. It is a call to stand alongside the oppressed and preserve the Word of God as good news for all rather than to turn it into a weapon with which to slay the oppressed. The Word of God is a word of love for all His creation. God is not the ally of one against the other, nor the opponent of one in the face of the other. God is the Lord of all and loves all, demanding justice from all and issuing to all of us the same commandments. We ask our sister Churches not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustice we suffer, for the sin of the occupation imposed upon us. Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love?

6-2 In order to understand our reality, we say to the Churches: Come and see. We will fulfil our role to make known to you the truth of our reality, receiving you as pilgrims coming to us to pray, carrying a message of peace, love and reconciliation. You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike.

6-3 We condemn all forms of racism, whether religious or ethnic, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and we call on you to condemn it and oppose it in all its manifestations. At the same time we call on you to say a word of truth and to take a position of truth with regard to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land. As we have already said, we see boycott and disinvestment as tools of justice, peace and security for both Israel and us.

## **7. Our word to the international community**

7. Our word to the international community is to stop the principle of "double standards" and insist on the international resolutions regarding the Palestinian problem with regard to all parties. Selective application of international law threatens to leave us vulnerable to a law of

the jungle. It legitimizes the claims by certain armed groups and states that the international community only understands the logic of force. Therefore, we call for a response to what the civil and religious institutions have proposed, as mentioned earlier: the beginning of a system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel. We repeat once again that this is not revenge but rather a serious action in order to reach a just and definitive peace that will put an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and will guarantee security and peace for us and for Israel itself.

### **8. Jewish and Muslim religious leaders**

8. Finally, we address an appeal to the religious and spiritual leaders, Jewish and Muslim, with whom we share the same vision that every human being is created by God and has been given an equal dignity. Hence the obligation for each of us to defend the oppressed and the dignity God has bestowed on them. Let us together try to rise up above the political positions that have failed so far and continue to lead us on the path of failure and suffering.

### **9. A call to our Palestinian people and to the Israelis**

9-1 This is a call to see the face of God in each one of His creatures and overcome the barriers of fear or race in order to establish a constructive dialogue and not remain within the cycle of never-ending manoeuvres that aim to keep the situation as it is. Our appeal is to reach a common vision, built on equality and sharing, not on superiority, negation of the other or aggression, using the pretext of fear and security. We say that love is possible and mutual trust is possible. Thus, peace is possible and definitive reconciliation also. Thus, justice and security will be attained for all.

9-2 Education is important. Educational programs must help us to get to know the other as he or she is rather than through the prism of conflict, hostility or religious fanaticism. The educational programs in place today are infected with this hostility. "You do not know us and we do not know you", Israelis and Palestinians might well say to one another. The time has come to begin a new education that allows one to see the face of God in the other and declares that we are capable of loving each other and building our future together in peace and security.

9-3 Trying to make the state a religious state, Jewish or Islamic, suffocates the state, confines it within narrow limits, and transforms it into a state that practices discrimination and exclusion, preferring one citizen over

another. We appeal to both religious Jews and Muslims: let the state be a state for all its citizens, with a vision constructed on respect for religion but also equality, justice, liberty and respect for pluralism and not on domination by a religion or a numerical majority.

9-4 To the leaders of Palestine we say that current divisions weaken all of us and cause more sufferings. Nothing can justify these divisions. For the good of the people, which must outweigh that of the political parties, an end must be put to division. We appeal to the international community to lend its support towards this union and to respect the will of the Palestinian people as expressed in liberty.

9-5 Jerusalem is the foundation of our vision and our entire life. She is the city to which God gave a particular importance in the history of humanity. She is the city towards which all people are in movement – and where they will meet in friendship and love in the presence of the One Unique God, according to the vision of the prophet Isaiah: *"In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it (...) He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"* (Is. 2: 2-5). The city belongs today to two peoples and three religions; and it is on this prophetic vision and on the international resolutions concerning the totality of Jerusalem that any political solution must be based. This is the first issue that should be negotiated because the recognition of Jerusalem's sanctity and her message will be a source of inspiration towards finding a solution to the entire problem, which is largely a problem of mutual trust and ability to set in place a new land in this land of God.

### **10. Hope and faith in God**

10. In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that his goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here "a new land" and "a new human being", capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters.