

Peace for Life An Islamic Response to Kairos Palestine

Preface

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An Islamic Response to Kairos Palestine is an initiative of the Muslims in *Peace for Life* (PFL), a global solidarity network of peace advocates rooted in faith communities engaged in various forms of resistance to state terrorism and Empire and committed to interfaith, South-South and South-North solidarity and progressive faith-based responses to the urgencies of justice and peace.

The [*Kairos Palestine - a Moment of Truth*](#)¹ is a declaration issued in 2009 and signed by most Palestinian Christian leaders. Its signatories described the document, drawn up after “prayer, reflection and an exchange of opinion,” as a

[...] cry 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 God’s divine providence for all the inhabitants of this land. Inspired by the mystery of God’s love for all, the mystery of God’s 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.

Kairos Palestine has resonated across the world and numerous communities and religious leaders have responded to it. It is a heartfelt call from our oppressed Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters to the world to act in the face of their daily humiliation and dispossession. PFL is deeply committed to intensifying the solidarity of the global religious community against Israeli Apartheid, and the PFL Muslim members feel a particular moral duty to respond to *Kairos Palestine* from an Islamic perspective. We say to our Christian sisters and brothers in Palestine: “We hear your cries; you are not alone. We need each other now more than ever before and we commit ourselves to walking the journey towards freedom and justice in Palestine side by side with you.”

In responding to *Kairos Palestine* we respond to the Islamic imperative to identify with the oppressed and the marginalized. We do so in a manner that a) reflects our inadequacies as Muslims; b) rejects attempts to co-opt our faith for the agenda of Empire; and c) offers a vision of Islam that is just, compassionate and recognizes the sacredness of all of humankind while maintaining a particular bias for those whom the Qur’an refers to as the marginalized in the earth (*mustad`afin fil-ard*).

Muslims across the globe are invited to sign this document.

¹ *Kairos Palestine – a Moment of Truth* is available online
<http://www.kairospalestine.ps/?q=content/document>

An Islamic Response to Kairos Palestine

In the Name of Allah, the Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace

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Oh you who have attained to faith, rise as witness-bearers for Allah, with regard to Justice, though this may be against yourselves [...] Do not follow your own desires lest you swerve from justice; for if you distort the truth, God is indeed aware of all that you do. (*Al-Nisa*, ayah 135)

We are Muslims – religious leaders, scholars, activists and ordinary believers struggling to live out our faith in fidelity to the Noble Qur’an and the demands of justice. We hail from different parts of the world and represent diverse tendencies within the House of Islam.

For decades we have witnessed the systematic dispossession of the Palestinian people – Muslims, Christians and others – of their land and watched as they were stripped of their human rights and treated as sub-human outsiders in their ancestral land. We have regularly lamented this and protested against their ongoing persecution and marginalization. We acknowledge that our responses could have been stronger and that we have not adequately articulated the Islamic imperative to stand in solidarity with the oppressed.

Kairos Palestine - A Moment of Truth has awakened in us a keenness to speak truth to power – even if that power may reside within us. In the words of the Qur’an, ‘*wa law ‘ala anfuskim*’ (“even if this may be against yourselves”, *Al-Nisa*, ayah 34).

Our statement in response to *Kairos Palestine* document is addressed to a) the Muslim ummah (global community), b) the Christians of Palestine, c) the Jewish community and d) the international community.

Our Message to the Muslim Ummah

We affirm the often heroic actions of many in our community who stand in solidarity with the Palestinian and other oppressed people, making huge sacrifices in order to remain true to the Islamic demand for justice and dignity. At the same time, we stand in humility in front of Allah for our collective and individual failures to support vigorously the struggle of the Palestinian people. In the face of the daily humiliation and injustices visited upon Palestinians, we have been guilty of living a pretence of normalcy and of often inadequate responses. The rulers and governments in many of our countries have offered half-hearted public condemnation of Zionism and the occupation of Palestinian land and lives, on the one hand, while having actively or passively collaborated with the Israeli regime to contain their populations’ solidarity with the Palestinian people.

We are proud of the many parts of the ummah who have, recently, compelled their rulers to yield to their cries for freedom and justice. We call on our people to be vigilant to ensure that their victories not be usurped by those Western powers who have been deeply complicit in the oppression of the Palestinian people.

We acknowledge our responsibility to work for peace. We do so not in response to the demands of imperialists and Islamophobes who insist that Muslims must eschew any form of resistance to occupation and imperial adventures in pursuit of oil and other natural resources. Our struggle for peace responds to the invitation of the Almighty “to the abode of peace” (*Yunus, ayah 25*). This bears no resemblance to the “peace” of the Empire, which is one of silence and acquiescence in the face of dispossession and occupation. Theirs is a peace which trades in death; ours is one that seeks justice

The peace that the Qur’an calls us to is one of life, justice and dignity. We are mindful of the Qur’anic obligation to disrupt the established order (even if presented in the garb of “peace”) if it is based on injustice and dispossession, as is clearly the case in Palestine.

“Allah has created the heavens and the earth in truth; so that every person may be justly compensated for what she [he] had earned and none may be wronged” (*Al-Jathiyah, ayah 22*). This verse, as well as *Al-Zumar, ayah 69*, equates justice with truth. “God (himself) bears witness that He is the Upholder of justice” (*Al-Nisa, ayah 18*). The Qur’an exhorts the faithful to uphold justice as an act of witness unto Him (*Al-Nisa, ayah 135* and *Al-Ma’idah ayah 6*) and those who sacrifice their lives in the path of establishing justice are equated with those who achieve martyrdom in “the path of God” (*Ali Imran, ayah 20*).

The Most Gracious has imparted this Qur’an. He has created humankind; He has imparted unto him [her] speech. The sun and the moon follow courses computed; the stars and the trees submit; and the skies He has raised high; and He has set up the balance of justice in order that you may not transgress the measure. So, establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. It is He who has spread out the earth for [all] His creatures. (*Al-Rahman, ayahs 1-10*)

The Qur’an places humankind and the task of doing justice within the context of their responsibility to the Creator, on the one hand, and the order which runs through the cosmos on the other. It is within this overall context that human beings are being warned against “transgressing the measure” and exhorted to “weigh [your dealings] with justice” (*Al-Rahman, ayahs 7-9*). “God has sent His Messengers and revealed His Books so that people may establish justice” (*Al-Hadid, ayah 25*).

The Qur’an posits a universe based on a foundation of justice. The natural order is one rooted in justice; deviation from it is disorder (*fitnah*). The status quo, irrespective of how long it has survived or how stable it has become, does not enjoy intrinsic legitimacy in Islam. Injustice is a deviation from the natural order and even though it might stabilize over decades by establishing new facts on the ground, it is, nonetheless, regarded as a disruption of “the balance”. In the Qur’anic paradigm, justice and the natural order based on it are values to be upheld, while socio-political stability *per se* is not. When confronted with this disturbance in the natural order through the systematic erosion of human rights, the Qur’an imposes an obligation on the faithful to challenge such a system until it is eliminated and society is again restored to its natural state – that of justice.

The Qur'an offers itself as an inspiration and guide for comprehensive insurrection against an unjust status quo. It, furthermore, asks to be read through a commitment to destroy oppression and aggression and to establish justice.

Page | 4 We call on all Muslims to deepen and intensify our resistance to all forms of oppression and to strengthen our solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Our Message to the Christians of Palestine

Our dear brothers and sisters, we salute the courage and steadfastness displayed by you in resisting the occupation and the theft of your homes, olive groves and lands. We are deeply humbled by your persistent refusal to succumb to the divide and rule games of the occupiers. Your religious leaders' commitment to freedom and their prophetic voices reflected in *Kairos Palestine* is nothing short of inspirational. We are touched to read in it your bearing witness to the oppression and indignity suffered by Palestinians of all persuasions. Your role in articulating the truth that this is not a battle between Jews and Muslims but one between occupier and occupied cannot be expressed by any of us with the same integrity as you have done.

We acknowledge that we, the Muslim ummah, have often been indifferent to your presence in Palestine - a presence that pre-dates the coming of Islam. We have not been adequately mindful of the absolute centrality of Palestine as sacred space in the Christian tradition, and as the place where Christ (may the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him and upon his pure mother) was born and ended his sojourn on earth, and many of us have been ignorant of your sacrifices for freedom and justice.

We acknowledge that we have sometimes articulated a vision for a post-apartheid Palestine that appears to be one where one form of ideological domination - Zionism - might be supplanted by another - Islamic domination. Often in our resistance to the ideological domination of Zionism we have come across as wanting more of the same, to become the evil that we abhor. In doing so, we have been unfaithful to the pluralism of our faith and the Qur'anic vision of a single people. Addressing all the prophets, the Qur'an declares: "Oh Prophets, consume of the good, and [remember] that these, your people, are a single people" (*Al-Mu'minun*, ayat 51-52).

We appreciate the message that you convey to the world in *Kairos Palestine* where you say that "Muslims are neither to be stereotyped as the enemy nor caricatured as terrorists, but rather to be lived with in peace and engaged with in dialogue."

We support your call for the post-apartheid Palestinian state to be one for "all 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."

We will work with our co-religionist Palestinians to create a society wherein all people, regardless of religious or sectarian affiliation will be treated equally. A second class citizenship for any Palestinian will diminish the worth of all Palestinians

and will be a betrayal of your sacrifices. Our call to Muslims to ensure justice is not only about justice for Muslims but for all.

A Message to our Jewish Brothers and Sisters

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Our dear brothers and sisters, we are ashamed of those of our co-religionists who routinely engage in the blanket demonizing of you and your religion. Much of their rhetoric is racist and anti-Semitic and too often fails to distinguish between the diverse tendencies among you. This is in conflict with the Qur'anic principle "No one shall bear the burden of [the crimes committed by] another." It is true that Jews have historically fared much better when they lived in Muslim majority societies than what they did in others. It is also true that anti-Semitism accelerated in the Muslim world after the *Nakba* (Catastrophe) visited upon the Palestinians by the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. These facts, however, cannot serve as rationalizations for anti-Semitism or for the dismissal of all Jews because of the crimes of some. Our own religious tradition require critical scrutiny and we struggle to find ways of reading our texts that will deepen our sense of the interconnectedness of all human beings - and all forms of life - and the requirements of justice.

We pledge ourselves to work against all forms of racism and discrimination - including anti-Semitism.

Some among you have, at great personal cost, stood up against injustices meted out to the Palestinian people, while others have called for and engaged in ethnic cleansing. You have insisted that such crimes against humanity cannot be committed in your name. Your solidarity inspires us and your presence in the trenches of struggle helps ensure that the Palestinian struggle for justice is not reduced to an anti-Jewish one.

Some of you lived in Palestine for centuries, pre-dating even Christians; others recently arrived from Cape Town, New York, Dar as Salaam or Moscow. In many cases those arriving in a land that they had only an ideological attachment to led to the displacement of numerous other people who inhabited the land for centuries. It is impossible for us to regard them as anything but usurpers.

They premised the idea of their entitlement to the land on a supposed unbroken conversation between God and Jews and a "perpetual enlistment in the divine army" in the words of Donald H. Akenson. The Zionist belief in the *chosenness* of a particular people (the Jewish people) who are granted a land by God is not unique. In South Africa, for example, Afrikaner children were taught to sing about "*die land uitgegee op gesag van die Hoogste se hand*" (the land given to us on the authority of the Almighty).

We reject the notion that the Eternally Transcendent and Almighty God is like a tribal chief or a dishonest realtor who parcels out land to His favourites, and we reject the idea our sacred texts can be abused as if they were title deeds of land ownership.

Many of you regard the State of Israel as a product of a Jewish struggle for self-determination and emancipation from the discrimination that Jews experienced primarily in Christian Europe, and also in Muslim North Africa and the Middle East. Neither the tragedy of unspeakable horror and genocide visited upon Jews by Nazi Germany, nor the ongoing attempts to manipulate this tragedy for narrow racist and ideological ends – thus creating new victims – must be allowed to be forgotten. Palestinians should not have to pay the price for Jewish “liberation”.

An injury inflicted on others invariably also dehumanizes the perpetrators. It is not possible to tear at another’s skin and not have one’s humanity also diminished in the process. To defend the Palestinians against the daily humiliation imposed by Israeli settlers, colonists, soldiers, the Israeli state and Zionism itself is to defend the best in what Jews have to offer the world. An injury to one *is* an injury to all. The distinguished Jewish Liberation theologian, Marc Ellis, wrote: “It is no longer possible to raise the banner of revolution for one people only.” You cannot build your security on the insecurity of others. In the freedom of and justice for the Palestinian people are the seeds of your own liberation, security and humanity.

A Message to the Global Community

We are astonished at how ordinary decent people equivocate when it comes to the State of Israel and the dispossession and suffering it has imposed on the Palestinian people. Is ‘moderation’ in matters of manifest injustice a virtue? Do both parties deserve an ‘equal hearing’ because the oppressor had been oppressed some time previously? Those who opt for illusionary neutrality are, by this “neutrality” being acquiescent to the dominant and oppressive party. We Muslims call on you seriously to consider the Qur’anic idea of a God of all people (*rabb al-nas*) Who makes clear that “We wished to be gracious to those who had been oppressed in the earth” (*Al-Qasas, ayah 5*), Who emphasizes that Divine Favour is for the oppressed and against the oppressor.

The notion of some people that “both sides have a story to tell” is a way of their evading responsibility for their complicity in the perpetration of injustices. Not only does such a position hallow the abuser with a mantle of respectability, the silence draws us all into a web of complicity. In the case of the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis, only those who refused to turn a blind eye and refused to be silent can be regarded as having been civilized. All others were guilty of having Jewish blood on their hands. Talking about the “Jewish-German conflict” when referring to the holocaust against Jews, or the “Black-White situation” when referring to apartheid in South Africa, or “marital problems” when referring to domestic violence is not virtuous; it is the path of acquiescence and complicity.

We call on you to identify with the calls made in the Kairos Palestine, and to join the growing international Palestine solidarity movement. Ordinary people throughout the world contributed in numerous ways to the struggle to end South African apartheid. We can also contribute to ending Israeli Apartheid. We call on you to hold your lawmakers to account for the way they spend your taxes and ensure that none of it supports the oppression of the Palestinian people and the occupation of their land; to demand that your local grocer does not sell products that originate from Israel; to monitor the foreign policies of your countries and demand that ethics

and morality be inserted into their decisions on economic partnerships; to visit Palestine and to see it from the eyes of the least, the broken and the dispossessed, from the eyes of those courageous human beings who resist oppression in order to struggle for their own humanity and that of their oppressors..

Page | 7 Let us all join together, keeping the Palestinian people in our prayers and seeking concrete ways to be and act in solidarity with them.

Wa ma tawfiq illa billah

To sign this document, please click [this link](#) to visit the signing webpage.

The declaration, [Kairos Palestine - a Moment of Truth](#), is available online.