



Dear Right Rev. Dr. Bott and Rev. Blair,

Greetings from Canadian Friends of Sabeel to The United Church Canada General Council.

Canadian Friends of Sabeel (CFOS) is a registered charity and ecumenical organization whose vision is to energize the Canadian Christian community as we pursue a durable peace - rooted in justice, freedom, equal rights, and the principles of nonviolence - for all Palestinians and Israelis. We do this work in response to calls for solidarity from the Palestinian community by faithfully engaging, educating, and equipping the Canadian Christian community and our partners, as we pursue our shared calling and vision. Our efforts are guided by the Christian values of justice, peace, and solidarity.

As one of the organizations invited to make submissions to the Task Group, we are sending this letter to commend the Task Group for the work done by its members, and for its important and timely recommendation of a principles-based approach. The principles outlined by the Task Group are critical not only for engaging with the three areas outlined in part one (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions - or BDS; the question of Apartheid; and the term 'Jewish state'), but are principles that can offer clarity in future areas of work. A principles-based approach would allow The United Church of Canada to ground its work in values that speak to our Christian faith, and apply them to concerns of social justice around the world in order to faithfully live into what Jesus calls us, as Christians, to do.

The fourteen principles outlined in the report reflect our values as followers of Christ, who calls on us to speak truthfully, act with humility, resist oppression and injustice through non-violent means, and commit ourselves to listen and act despite the challenges that arise from doing so (costly solidarity). In practice, these principles offer significant guidance on decolonization, in particular on the question of decolonizing our churches and faith-based communities through our theology.

We commend the Task Group's efforts to put the principles into practice to engage areas of BDS, Apartheid, and Israel's identity as a Jewish State. We recognize that these are difficult questions, and look to the principles of costly solidarity, and speaking truthfully, to be able to answer these questions as followers of Christ.

Critical to the call for costly solidarity, is telling the truth despite how hard it may be to do so. Discerning whether or not to use the word apartheid is a telling example of this. It is important to note that apartheid is widely considered to be an accurate description of the situation on the ground. We concur with the characterization of Israel as an apartheid state by major human rights organizations including B'Tselem, Human Rights Watch, and most recently, Amnesty International. After decades of work in the region, all these organizations have come to the same

conclusion: “that Israeli authorities are enforcing a system of apartheid against *all* Palestinians living under their effective control - whether they live in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), or in other countries as refugees.” This also reflects the wording in the [resolution](#) approved by The United Church of Christ in 2021 which names Israel’s apartheid system and laws. The principle of telling the truth, outlined in the Task Groups recommendation, is a commitment that CFOS commends and follows, and is one that reflects our role as followers of Christ.

On the question of apartheid, the Just Peace Task Group’s report also draws from principle m) on dialogue, noting: “the team recognizes the power of the word apartheid to block dialogue, and to vilify.” While we recognize the importance of dialogue as a central pillar of our faith as followers of Christ, we look to Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac’s [open letter to Christians](#) - where he cautions against the misuse of Christian-Jewish dialogue to silence criticism of Israel. We urge that the principle of dialogue not be used to compromise the remaining thirteen principles outlined in the report. Our dialogue must bring us closer to truth, decolonization, equity, and justice - not make us stray further away.

In addition, we also believe these principles will support better dialogue with diverse Canadian groups, including Christian, Jewish and Muslim groups, whose values are also aligned with these principles. While I am now serving as Chair of Canadian Friends of Sabeel which, as an organization, was consulted early on in the process, I was also consulted by the Task Group as an individual member of the Palestinian Canadian community of Christian faith. I want to take this opportunity to personally thank you for this consultation and dialogue that was very meaningful to me and for pursuing the concept of such principles which I had discussed with the Task Group. This is just one personal example of meaningful and constructive dialogue that these principles can continue to encourage.

We commend the emphasis on using a lens of decolonisation, and the grounding of this report in a theological framework. This is especially timely, as we are being challenged as people of faith to think critically about the role our institutions have had in upholding colonialism, especially here in Canada. We encourage the United Church to continue to think about decolonisation in a way that is grounded in theology, as Christ’s church. We also encourage decolonisation to be considered in relation to theology, particularly in the case of Palestine, where certain theological interpretations have upheld Christian Zionism - a theology that is incompatible with our faith. Decolonising the churches must also mean decolonising theology, and challenging interpretations that allow for our churches to be complicit in the ongoing colonization and apartheid unfolding in the Holy Land. As the Just Peace Task Group’s report notes, we are not disengaged from this context of colonialism. Thus, this process of decolonisation will require that we look within ourselves (from our faith, to our institutions), as we do this challenging work, and aim to live into what Jesus calls on us to do.

We urge the United Church to stay true to these principles and continue to lead the way in social justice work as people of faith. We believe that the principles outlined by the Just Peace Task group reflect the report’s outlined goal to respond to the call from Christ to “stand in costly solidarity with those who seem most at risk of losing the fullness of life that God intends for all people.” We believe these principles can be inspirational to other Canadian churches as we all strive towards being true in our commitment as followers of Christ.

We ask that the GC44 Commissioners be given a copy of this letter. If for some reason that is not possible, we ask that you notify us of that decision at your earliest convenience. We thank you so much for your continued commitment to this important work.



Rula Odeh
Chair
Canadian Friends of Sabeel