



H.E. Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister of Israel
3 Kaplan St. Hakiryia
Jerusalem, 91950

H.E. Ron Dermer
Ambassador of Israel to the United States
3514 International Drive, NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

February 12, 2019

Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu,
Dear Ambassador Dermer,

We write to you as leaders of two US-based North American Christian Protestant communions, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the US and Canada, and the United Church of Christ in the US, whose membership approaches 1.6 million faithful between the two churches. Our two churches have long histories of nurturing the faith of our members based on our understanding of sacred scripture, of engaging in God's mission around the world including in the Middle East, and of participating in (and leading) efforts to support peace with justice in our domestic context as well as with Christian and other faith-based partners around the world. We are proud of our traditions' public witness and will continue to respond to our perceived call to do so.

In the Middle East, the Disciples and the UCC have more than 150 and 200 years of engagement, respectively. It is a special region of the world for us because of that history; as well as our faith history and connections to the places of the Biblical stories, including those of both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. We have accompanied the people of the region, including the Christians, in their journeys of faith, presence, and engagement, as they seek safety and stability, justice, peace, and equality of rights. That concern includes the people of Israel and the Palestinian people. As people of faith, we have engaged this issue, as we have a host of international issues over our churches' histories, through the lens of an understanding of God's vision for the world God created, and for the people who are all children of God. We tirelessly and persistently work for a just and lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, fervently praying and taking action toward that end.

Two summers ago in 2017, the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, both of which are our churches' highest governing bodies and which meet every two years (in odd numbered years), adopted parallel resolutions entitled, "A Call to Advocate for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Occupation." (The texts of these resolutions are attached to this letter.) The resolutions draw attention to the rights of children globally, as affirmed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Israel ratified in 1991, a year after the Convention came into force. The Convention calls on all states to "treat every child deprived of liberty with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age," to use arrest and imprisonment of children "only as a

measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time,” to give detained children “prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty” and “the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits,” and in no case to subject children to “torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

UNICEF has reported that the “ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized” and that subsequent reports have found that the situation has changed little for Palestinian children arrested by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank—including in middle-of-the-night raids. According to reports by UNICEF, the US Department of State, and organizations such as Defense of Children International, this ill-treatment of children includes the use of blindfolds; hand-ties; strip searches; physical violence; verbal abuse and intimidation; the use of position abuse, threats, and isolation by interrogators to coerce confessions; the use of solitary confinement for interrogation purposes denial of access to lawyers and parents prior to and during interrogation; failure to inform children of their legal rights, such as their right to remain silent; and the routine transfer of Palestinian children out of the occupied Palestinian territories to prisons inside Israel in violation of international law.

Such treatment of children and youth is extremely disturbing, and unconscionable to us. In fulfillment of the resolutions adopted by our general gatherings, **we therefore write to express the hope and call of our churches that the State of Israel guarantee basic due process rights and exercise an absolute prohibition against torture and ill-treatment of detained children (defined as persons under 18 years of age) ensuring that, from the moment of arrest, all operations and procedures are carried out in accordance with international juvenile justice standards, specifically the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

Our Christian scripture demonstrates that Jesus privileged children, welcomed them and blessed them. Indeed, God’s love was revealed in a child. We as a church too recognize the blessing and vulnerability of children, and are committed to their protection and their rights, as we are all created in the image of God.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage further with you on this issue, and would be eager for your response.

Very sincerely,



Rev. Dr. Teresa Hord Owens
General Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
PO Box 1986
Indianapolis, IN 46206-1986



Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ
700 Prospect Ave., E
Cleveland, OH 44115