



25 June 2015

My dear sisters and brothers in the United Church of Canada:

I recall so joyously the witness and generosity of your Church in helping those of us caught in the shackles of apartheid during those dark days of our oppression. You were an enormous strength to us, and we forever remain bonded in our commitment to justice for all people everywhere.

In recent years, I have been increasingly dismayed at the deteriorating conditions of the Palestinian people living under occupation, which has now gone on for 47 years with no end in sight. Even a decade or more ago when I first visited the Holy Land I saw the marks of apartheid in the policies of the Israeli government continued to the present day. The Palestinians are forced to live in segregated areas, often relocated to less desirable land so Jewish settlers can live in fine red ceramic-roofed houses with paved roads while most Palestinians live in squalor in villages and refugee camps. Water is diverted to settlers so that they can have nice green lawns, irrigated fields and community swimming pools while Palestinians endure shortages and dusty roads. I have looked at this and seen the ugly face of apartheid and the racism within it. I have been vilified numerous times for making this comparison to apartheid. I shrink not one step backwards. I saw and I name what I saw: apartheid, separation, segregation. I might add that these settlements are illegal under international law, as is the occupation itself, and an affront to the world.

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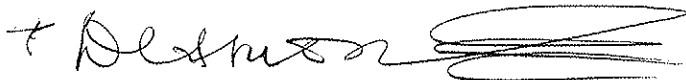
Where this wall or fence or barrier violates Palestinian land, it serves as a form of segregation. I remain heartbroken to see the gross injustice of the occupation being imposed by Jewish people who, themselves, have endured so many centuries of oppression and suffering, much of it at the hands of Christians, culminating in the tragedy of the Holocaust. One would have expected just the opposite, a country, Israel, which would be a light to the nations, a beacon of justice. Other Jewish voices have arisen to denounce what is done in their name through this shameful occupation.

I understand the enormous burden western Christians carry for the many centuries of anti-Semitic behavior towards our Jewish sisters and brothers. It is a dreadful record which will require years of healing and reconciling work to overcome fully the depredations of the past. But I must point out to you quite emphatically that the injustices borne by Jewish people in Europe and later Canada cannot be corrected at the expense of another injustice perpetrated against the Palestinian people. Why should the Palestinians be the bearers of the sins of western complicity in anti-Semitism and the Holocaust? Your rightful initiative to reconcile with the Jewish people should not come with a blind eye for the inhumane policies inflicted by the state of Israel on the Palestinians.

I therefore commend you to carry on with and expand your Unsettling Goods campaign. I urge the United Church of Canada to join with other denominations around the globe who have decided to boycott and divest from companies that benefit from the occupation. Also I urge you to recognize your own country's complicity in Palestinian suffering under occupation. Please read and study the proposals before you that advocate furthering boycotts and divestment. You proved with us in South Africa that only economic pressure could force the powerful to the table. As you have courageously done before, may you once again witness to the cause of Christ's justice to free the oppressed and by so doing to liberate the oppressor so that these two peoples can finally be reconciled and live together in dignity, security and peace.

God bless you all as you as a Church wrestle to discern what God requires of you in this hour. With a heart full of love to a people I will always embrace, I am

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Desmond", followed by a large, stylized flourish or underline.

+Desmond Archbishop Emeritus Cape Town