



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 52, Folder 4, World Council of Churches, 1967.

L E T T E R A D D R E S S E D

To the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches
By WCC Member and related Churches in Syria and Lebanon

Dr. Eugene C. Blake,
General Secretary,
World Council of Churches,
150, Route de Ferney,
1211, Geneva 20,
Switzerland

Beirut, June 27, 1967

Dear Dr. Blake,

Warm greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ from the Member Churches of the World Council of Churches in this area and related Christian communities.

This letter is in continuation of our telegram of June 19th about the current conflict in the Middle East, and is intended to provide background for some of the points raised in that brief message.

We are very grateful for your personal interest in the Churches and the peoples of this area, and for the visit of Father Paul Verghese to whom we have explained in some detail our basic convictions and present thinking on the situation. We will be further indebted to you for interpreting our position to the Member Churches of the World Council of Churches, to the general public and to the governmental and international authorities concerned.

1. The faits accomplis of the last twenty years should not be allowed to become permanent reality, just because they have happened. At the time of the Balfour Declaration, in 1917, 56,000 Jews and 600,000 Arabs lived together in peace in Palestine. The Jews then owned 2% only of the lands of Palestine. During the British mandate over Palestine, Jews from all nations of Europe flooded into the country, inspite of the strong and violent opposition of the indigenous population, so that the Jewish population between 1917 and 1948 increased to 600,000 while the Arab population reached 1,300,000. Jewish land ownership in 1948 was less than 7% of the total area of Palestine.

● On November 29, 1947, and against the wishes of the majority of the population, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution recommending the creation of Arab and Jewish States in Palestine, the latter to have about 40% of the area of the country. However the Jews disregarded their proposed limits and occupied in 1948 and 1949 by force 80% of the area of Palestine. This month, they occupied the whole of the Holy Land and parts of the United Arab Republic, Jordan and Syria. By deliberate acts of cruelty, terror and expulsion perpetrated by the Israelis, around one million Arabs (which have since increased to one million three hundred thousand) were driven out from Palestine in 1948. One hundred and fifty thousand were driven out in June 1967 and the expulsions continue at the date of this letter.

./.

Thus the creation of the State of Israel for expatriates out of land that belonged to the Arabs is an act of grave injustice. The scar of this wound is still seen in the wide population of refugees, most of them settled in the totally inhuman conditions of the 54 UNRWA camps in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the United Arab Republic, not counting the new camps established to receive the victims of the last aggression during this month. The Arab nations find these facts difficult to overlook or forget.

2. The continuous economic, political and military support of Israel by Western powers has forced the Arab nations to divert their limited resources and energies from the urgent task of economic and social development to military purposes, and to seek military assistance from all possible sources to arm themselves against the Israeli military machine.

3. It is a fact often overlooked that on three occasions, in 1949, 1956 and in 1967, aggression was launched by Israel; and the allegation that such aggression was justified by acts of provocation is denied by the reports of the UN observers in the area and by the fact that during the last twenty years, Israel was condemned at least 18 times by the Security Council for violation of the armistice agreements.

4. The present act of aggression has sought to liquidate the problem of Palestine by occupying the whole of it, devouring a major portion of Jordan as well as parts of Syria and the United Arab Republic. It is clear that the violation of Syrian territory took place after Israel had agreed to the cease-fire. If these acts are not roundly and clearly condemned, and if the occupying troops are not immediately withdrawn, the bitterness that is growing in our countries is sure to have disastrous consequences on the peace of the world.

5. It is now established beyond doubt that napalm bombs were used by Israel, even on hospitals including the Augusta Victoria at Jerusalem used by Palestine refugees. Many civilians with deep napalm burns are now in hospitals in Jordan and Syria. This act should be condemned by the World Council of Churches as well as by Member Churches.

6. The problem of about a million and a half people who have been displaced from their homeland by the terrorism and aggressions of Israel Government during the past twenty years should be on the conscience of the Churches. This suffering and destitution are parallel to the experience of the Jewish people under the Third Reich, and the injustice of it is equally odious. Both Israel and the Western powers have to bear the whole responsibility for this immense affront to the dignity of man. The refugee camps have only erected permanent memorials to the indignity of what was done to more than a million human beings. These hovels of misery are the cry of man for dignity and justice.

7. The creation of Israel and its continuing support by Western powers can be understood by our peoples only as a supreme act of double hypocrisy. If Western

./.

nations were really prepared to make amends to the unfortunate Jewish people who suffered such inhuman cruelty at the hands of the Western peoples it would have been incumbent on the latter to find a homeland for the Jews in their own continent, and not at the expense of further cruelty and aggression inflicted by the same Western peoples on the Arab peoples who were not strong enough to resist the might of the Great Powers.

The West owes it to the Arab peoples to liberate Palestine from their hands of peoples brought in with the support of Western powers, mostly from their own countries. The continuing presence of Israel in the Middle East should be an affront to the conscience of the Christian West.

8. When Arab leaders speak about the elimination of Israel, this is often misunderstood in terms of a threat of genocide. We hope you can interpret to our Western brethren, that this way of thinking is totally foreign to our people. What our leaders mean is that the State of Israel was unjustly created and should cease to exist as a racial State. Born through aggression such a state intends to absorb the Jews of the world and is a constant threat of future aggression and further expansions. The Arab nations would welcome the continued stay of Palestinian Jews in Palestine with whom they have always lived and worked. Once the elimination of Israel as a State can be achieved ways can be found for a large number of expatriate Jews to be absorbed into the Palestinian community. Our people do not want to kill Jews, but do want the cessation of the racial State of Israel.

9. It has caused us Christians deepfelt pain and bitter resentment to hear some of our Christian brethren in the West pronounce with such astounding ease of conscience unqualified support for Israeli aggression and such inhuman jubilation over the victories of the aggressor. The matter becomes, in our minds at any rate, definitely demoniacal, when the biblical promises to Abraham are politically exploited to lend support to the totally unbiblical zionist movement of which Israel is both the symbol and the reality.

10. We hope that you will sense from this letter the deep sense of outrage that the Christian and Muslim peoples of this area feel at the conduct of Israel and the Western powers. We feel that there is not much willingness in the West even to understand our thoughts and convictions or to listen to the rightness of our cause. We know that you yourself keep an open attitude to this question. We would request you, in the name of the Churches of this area, to convene, as soon as physically possible, though certainly before the summer meetings of the Central and Executive Committees this year, a small consultation of C.C.I.A. commissioners with some representatives of the Churches in this area. This will give all of us an opportunity to clear up mutual misunderstanding and for an open discussion of some of these issues. The tension that has arisen between us and our brethren in the West seems to us sufficiently serious to justify an immediate convering of such a consultation.

We would also appreciate any assistance you can give us in interpreting our position to the Western Christians and to the general public through your own personal correspondence and public addresses.

With the renewed affirmation of our basic loyalty to the Ecumenical Movement and especially to the World Council of Churches, and our sincere prayers that peace with justice and dignity may prevail in the land of Christ's birth, we remain,

Yours in the risen Lord,

THEODOSIUS VI
PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH
AND ALL THE EAST
GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

MAR IGNATIUS YACOB III
PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH
AND ALL THE EAST
SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

KHOREN I
CATHOLICOS OF CILICIA
ARMENIAN ORTHODOX
CHURCH

REV. HOVHANNES AHARONIAN
UNION OF ARMENIAN
EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

DR. FARID AWDEH
NATIONAL EVANGELICAL
CHURCH OF BEIRUT

REV. IBRAHIM DACHER
NATIONAL EVANGELICAL
SYNOD OF SYRIA AND
LEBANON

REV. SAMIR KAFITY
EPISCOPAL VICAR DIOCESE
OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
IN JORDAN LEBANON AND
SYRIA