

NO. 0522
(SENSE-OF-THE-ASSEMBLY)
BREAKING DOWN THE DIVIDING WALL

Theological Rationale

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. (Ephesians 2:14)

A central tenet of our Christian faith is the possibility for reconciliation among peoples. This human reconciliation through God's love was demonstrated by Jesus Christ, and reported to the people of Ephesus by Paul. We are called to be people of reconciliation and called to engage in the act of reconciliation. Barriers to reconciliation exist in many forms and in many places. When barriers are constructed, hostility that exists becomes exacerbated. Differences between peoples can only be addressed through bringing them together, not by adding further divisions. By breaking down walls that separate, we actively seek peace and reconciliation in the world in an attempt to follow Jesus' example. In doing so, we seek an end to hostility.

Background Information

In June 2002, the State of Israel began an ambitious construction. Construction of a separation barrier—also known as the “security fence” and as the “Wall”—commenced and continues to this day.

According to Israeli plans, the barrier will be over 400 miles (650 kilometers) in length, at a cost not less than \$1.6 million per mile (\$1 million per km), and will exceed \$1 billion for the entire project. The main barrier takes on many forms, including 8-meter high cement walls, 3-meter high electric and barbed-wire fences, and a combination of the two. The infrastructure of the barrier that also includes a buffer zone on both sides, surveillance cameras, trenches, and observation posts compounds what Israeli human rights activist Jeff Halper calls the “matrix of control” of settlements, by-pass roads and checkpoints.

The barrier violates multiple international conventions, agreements, and resolutions, including article 2.4 of the United Nations Charter (prohibiting the use of force to violate territorial integrity), the Fourth Geneva Convention (prohibiting the destruction of land or property and the practice of collective punishment), and both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economical, Social, and Cultural Rights (defining rights of movement, property, health, education, work, and food). The barrier also is contrary to UN Security Council resolution 242 which calls for the “Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent [1967] conflict.”

The barrier encroaches into the occupied Palestinian territories from along the entire perimeter of the West Bank, frequently abutting or intersecting Palestinian villages, while leaving agricultural fields, shops, and family members on the opposite, Israeli-claimed side of the border. In places like Qalqilya, the barrier loops prominently into the West Bank, enveloping entire Palestinian villages and creating ghettos with a single, narrow checkpoint guarding the entrances to these

villages. It will result in Israel's effective annexation of roughly half of the West Bank, displacing and disconnecting Palestinians from their homes, families, neighbors, and fields. It is this encroachment and the resultant humanitarian crises that the Israeli Supreme Court addressed in its June 30, 2004 ruling, even as it found the motivation for the barrier, based on security concerns, justified.

In a more broad-reaching ruling on the barrier, the International Court of Justice ruled on the barrier's legality in a July 9, 2004 verdict. In sum, the decision rendered the construction of the barrier contrary to international law, recommended that the State of Israel end its construction and dismantle existing segments and that Israel pay reparations to those who have suffered loss as a result of the construction, and instructed the United Nations to pursue necessary means to address the illegality of the barrier. Both Israel and the U.S. disregarded this ruling and thereby dismissed the relevance of international law. The U.S. continues to provide more aid to Israel than to any other country in the world.

The impact of the visually, physically, psychologically and spiritually offensive barrier on the Palestinian people has been more devastating than abstract facts can convey. Homes have been demolished, water supplies have been cut off, fields have been razed, villages divided, and access to the other side has been cut off. Farmers have lost their fields or lost access to them. Faith-communities—including Palestinian Christians—have been denied access to houses of worship. Families have been split. According to UN estimates, 680,000 Palestinians (30% of the West Bank population) are directly affected. The Sabeel Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem reports that "Palestinians have been separated from their places of employment, their farmlands, hospitals, schools, places of worship and their families. In the first phase of the wall alone, 100,000 trees have been uprooted; 35,000 meters of irrigation networks have been destroyed; and 75% of teachers and students living in the construction areas have had difficulty arriving at school." These effects further deteriorate the quality of life of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories.

WHEREAS, the ongoing violence has created fear, whittled away trust; and both Israel and Palestine have been deeply wounded politically, economically, physically, spiritually, socially, and psychologically; and

WHEREAS, the Israeli government, as part of its *de facto* policy of settlement and colonization, continues to construct the separation barrier, also known as the security fence and the wall, and plans to extend it to approximately 400 miles (650 kilometers) at a cost not less than \$1.6 million per mile (\$1 million per km), thereby rendering the internationally-endorsed Road Map for peace and other proposals for a negotiated two-state solution unachievable; and

WHEREAS the wall unilaterally changes an international border without direct negotiations between partners, effectively annexes nearly 50% of Palestinian West Bank land, and destroys the contiguity of Palestinian life and land, rendering a Palestinian state unviable; and

WHEREAS, the barrier succeeds in confiscating Palestinian agricultural fields, water, and other natural resources, contributes to unemployment, and cuts populations off from such essentials of life as employment, education, health care, worship and family; and

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95 **WHEREAS**, the Israeli Supreme Court has questioned the legality of the path of the separation
96 barrier on humanitarian bases and the International Court of Justice has ruled that the barrier is,
97 *ipso facto*, illegal; and
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99 **WHEREAS**, the barrier has had devastating effects on the lives and livelihoods of Palestinians
100 living in the occupied territories by destroying homes, fields, and mobility, severely obstructing
101 health care, education, and even worship opportunities for Palestinians; and
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103 **WHEREAS**, history demonstrates that walls build barriers and limit the opportunity for people
104 in conflict to be in contact with each other and reconcile their differing points of view, and the
105 U.S. has previously demanded that walls of separation be torn down;
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107 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples
108 of Christ), mindful of all previous General Assembly resolutions and all previous board
109 resolutions and statements relating to the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and continuing to
110 denounce violence on all sides, specifically affirms the two-state solution to the Israeli-
111 Palestinian conflict, fully supporting the right of Israel to exist in peace with its neighbors and
112 protect itself within secure and internationally recognized borders and at the same time asserting
113 the same right to national sovereignty in a secure, recognized and viable state for Palestinians,
114 who would control their borders;
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116 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the General Assembly calls upon the Israeli government
117 to cease the project to construct the barrier, tear down the segments that have already been
118 constructed, and make reparations to those who have lost homes, fields, property, and/or lives
119 and health due to the barrier and its effects as security for both peoples can best be achieved
120 through an end to the occupation and efforts to encourage access and contact, rather than
121 restricting and denying it; and
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123 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the General Assembly urges the U.S. government to
124 persuade the Israeli government to abide by international law and agreements and withdraw from
125 the occupied Palestinian territories; and
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127 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the General Assembly calls upon the U.S. government to
128 engage actively, fully and fairly in a peace process that will lead to the peaceful coexistence of
129 two states: Israel and a future Palestine; and
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131 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the General Assembly encourages its members at all
132 settings of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to engage in prayer, study, and dialogue
133 about the barrier and to raise diligently with their governmental officials these concerns.
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Common Global Ministries Board of the
United Church of Christ and the
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
and Disciples Peace Fellowship