



PALESTINE ISRAEL ECUMENICAL NETWORK

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT PIEN

1. Who are we?

PIEN is a network of Australian Christians who seek lasting peace and justice for the people of Palestine and Israel. We comprise over 600 people from 11 different denominations of the Christian church within Australia. We were established by church leaders in Canberra back in 2006 and have steadily grown to be a national movement with members in every state and territory of Australia. PIEN welcomes as members or partners a number of supporters of other faiths or none who are equally committed to freedom, justice and peace for the people of Palestine and Israel.

2. What are our aims?

To encourage and equip Australian churches and the wider Australian community to promote peace and reconciliation in Palestine and Israel, inspired by Christ's vision for universal reconciliation. We work to achieve this peace and reconciliation by educating Australians on relevant human rights issues, seeking public policy change, influencing public opinion, advancing public debate, encouraging theological discussion and practical action for lasting peace and justice, expressing solidarity with the Christian communities in Palestine and Israel and collaborating with like-minded organisations in Australia and overseas.

3. How are we organised?

PIEN is an Association formally incorporated in Victoria. At the annual general meeting elections take place for President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, plus 8-10 additional Committee members. PIEN also has a paid part-time position of Executive Officer (8-12 hours per week), which is based in Melbourne. The Committee meets at least every second month, usually by telephone conference.

4. What compels us as Christians to be involved in working for peace and justice for Palestine and Israel?

As Christians we are inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, who declared that his mission was "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 3:18, Isaiah 61:1). This "liberation theology" draws the commitment of PIEN members and Palestinian Christians (eg, the Sabeel Liberation Theology Center, the Kairos Palestine movement) and thus compels us in PIEN to work and pray for peace and justice in the land where Jesus lived.

5. Who do we relate to?

We relate to a wide variety of (mainly Christian) organisations, including international, national and state/territory churches' councils and their international aid and development agencies (especially where they are active in supporting justice and peace in Palestine and Israel). We also engage directly with Christian communities in Palestine and Israel and with some Israeli human rights groups, and are a member of the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN).

6. Where does our funding come from?

The formal members of PIEN Incorporated pay a small annual subscription fee. The rest of our income comes from donations from Network members and supporters, together with other donations from some local congregations and church-related Australian groups.

7. What do we do?

- Through our website and our regular e-bulletins we provide up-to-date resources on Palestine-Israel for use by individuals, church groups, local congregations and church leaders. These resources include films, video clips, prayer and worship material, PowerPoint presentations, books, theological papers, invitations to participate in conferences, policy statements and requests for action from the Palestinian Christian community and from other churches across the world.
- We arrange tours of Australia by Palestinian Christian leaders who speak firsthand at church and public gatherings of their experiences, frustrations and hopes.
- We offer speakers with longstanding and recent experience of Palestine-Israel to speak to church and community groups.
- We ask church and ecumenical synods and assemblies in Australia to adopt resolutions and take actions which will contribute to peace and justice for Palestinians and Israelis.
- We organise occasional exposure visits to Palestine and Israel of Australian church leaders.
- We support and engage in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS) within Australia, particularly seeking to participate in specific boycott campaigns.
- We are active in promoting and supporting the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine-Israel.
- We participate in the advocacy work of the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, and occasionally make direct lobbying approaches to Parliamentarians ourselves.
- We engage with members of the Jewish community in Australia.
- We advocate strongly for peaceful means of resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestine. We seek a permanent, sustainable end to the oppression and injustice suffered by the Palestinian people. We oppose all action and incitement, whether by officials or agents of Israel or of Palestine, which involve or result in the use of arms or other violence. We respect all people's desire for security, self-determination and other fundamental rights, and we understand the prolonged denial of such security and rights can lead to frustration and resentment which places peaceful resolution at grave risk.

8. What most concerns us?

- The ongoing military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, for more than 50 years now, is the overriding injustice which prevents Palestinians and Israelis from living with peace and justice. There can be no peace and justice without an end to the occupation.
- Whilst noting that the Oslo Accords, 'on paper' provided limited authority to Palestinians in the West Bank - regarding Areas A, B and C - Palestinians in all three zones effectively live under Israeli military law while Israeli settlers living (illegally) on the same land live under Israeli civilian law. These same settlers are allowed to vote in the Knesset, whilst Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are denied a vote.
- The occupation - which was meant to occur for a brief period only - has after almost 52 years effectively resulted in the annexation of the West Bank by Israel. As the Israeli Government continues to expand the number of illegal settlements, to disregard the rights of the Palestinians, and to implement its July 2018 "nation-state" law (in relation, for example, to the status of Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided" capital, the denial of Palestinian self-determination, and the asserted legality of settlements), it becomes increasingly evident that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid against all Palestinians, including the 20% who are Israeli citizens. (*The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines the crime of apartheid as '...an institutionalised regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime'*).
- The constantly expanding number of illegal Israeli settlements and the increasing confiscation of Palestinian land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem inevitably work against the interests of peace and are in violation of International law.
- The land, sea and air blockade of Gaza which condemns the near 2 million Palestinian residents of Gaza to have to live in squalid inhuman conditions.

- The daily oppression and harassment of the Palestinian people, through military checkpoints and incursions, the separation (or apartheid) wall, the collective punishments, the arrests and detention of Palestinian children, the destruction of Palestinian olive groves, the demolition of Palestinian houses, administrative detention (imprisonment without trial or charge), the everyday control by the Israeli military of the Palestinian people and communities.
- The response of some Palestinians in resorting to violence which does nothing to contribute to a resolution but instead contributes to the cycle of violence.
- The disproportionate response of the Israeli Government to the sporadic outbursts of violence from a few Palestinians which generally brings many deaths and injuries to Palestinian people, and contributes only to the cycle of violence. Israel's collective punishment is in violation of International law.
- The rapidly declining number of Christians in Palestine and Israel. In 1948 Christians comprised around 20% of the Palestinian population. That figure is now less than 2%, due to Christian emigration from Palestine into Western countries. Church leaders in the Holy Land are greatly concerned that the diminishing Christian presence means that the Christian faith will soon become only a historical or museum presence in the land of Jesus Christ.
- The lack of will in the Israeli Government to make any moves for a peaceful resolution.
- The one-sided blind support for Israel and its policies from our Australian Governments.
- The inability of the United Nations to take initiative in establishing a genuine peace process.

9. How do I join PIEN?

Go to <https://pien.org.au/join-us> and follow us on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/PalestineIsraelEcumenicalNetwork/>

QUESTIONS ABOUT BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS

10. Do we support the BDS movement?

Yes. The BDS movement is a non-violent means of working for change in the current stand-off, by seeking to influence public opinion in Australia and internationally through peaceful means of advocacy and action.

11. Do Palestinians support the BDS movement?

Yes. In 2005 170 Palestinian organisations called for the formation of a BDS movement, leading in 2007 to the establishment of the Palestinian BDS National Committee (<https://bdsmovement.net>). In the Kairos Palestine document of 2009 Palestinian Christians called for “the beginning of a system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel”, and the 13 Jerusalem Heads of Churches endorsed the document that same year. Palestinians continue to be very active in supporting the growing BDS movement across the world.

12. Do other church bodies support the BDS movement?

Yes. Many churches throughout the world have passed resolutions and taken action in support of BDS or a limited form of BDS focussing on products from the illegal settlements. These include churches such as the Uniting Church in Australia, the Church of England, the United Church of Canada, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian churches in the USA and many European churches.

13. Do any Jewish bodies support the BDS movement?

Yes. Leaders of Independent Australian Jewish Voices have spoken and written in support of BDS. The huge American organisation, Jewish Voice for Peace, supports in full and actively promotes the BDS movement. Other groups support a limited version of BDS, such as the Australian Jewish Democratic Society which supports the boycott of goods produced in the illegal settlements. Many Jewish individuals, both in Israel and across the world, also support BDS. We note, however, that

the Israeli Government and many Jewish organisations including some in Australia, are very strongly opposed to the BDS movement.

14. Why is BDS different from the racist boycotts experienced by Jews in Nazi Germany?

PIEN acknowledges the discrimination and persecution experienced by members of the Jewish community in Nazi Germany with boycotts against Jewish people and Jewish businesses. BDS actions are not based on a product, company or service being Jewish. BDS campaigns are directed against the Israeli Government and other entities and businesses, Israeli or international, which directly or indirectly support Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and its blockade of the Gaza Strip, in violation of international law.

15. Are we calling for a boycott of everything Israeli?

No. We recognise that BDS should not be applied against Israelis or other individuals, companies and organisations that oppose the occupation and seek peace and justice for the people of Palestine and Israel. Our first BDS actions will be for boycotts of those who are heavily involved in the occupation or the illegal settlements.

QUESTIONS ABOUT OTHER PIEN VIEWS AND ACTIONS

16. Do we support a two-state or one-state solution?

Neither. While acknowledging that a two-state solution is still the stated position of the Palestinian Authority, the United Nations and the Australian Government and Opposition we suspect that its time may have passed. The Israeli Government occasionally pays lip-service to the two-state solution but in reality does not support it. The policy platform of the Likud Party states that there will never be a Palestinian state west of the Jordan, and most current members of the Israeli Cabinet have declared their opposition to a Palestinian state. Israel continues to build illegal settlements on Palestinian land in such a way as to make a two state solution increasingly unviable. Several alternatives to a two-state solution, which seek to ensure the existence of both peoples within what was British-mandated Palestine, have received unofficial support by various writers, Palestinian and Israeli, as well as internationally. They have included a one-state solution, as a genuine democracy with equal rights for all, and a confederation in which some functions and responsibilities would be shared while others would be separately managed. Given the current Israeli government's implacable opposition to anything other than the status quo (of occupation, blockade, settlements, etc), PIEN believes the prospect of any alternative that would achieve genuine peace with justice remains remote, but also expects that a future single, genuinely democratic state may well be the best outcome in the interests of all Israelis and Palestinians. We recognise that such an actual, long term, sustainable outcome can only be achieved by the mutual agreement of Israel and Palestine, working under the auspices of the United Nations.

17. How do we relate to the Jewish community in Australia?

PIEN seeks always to be open and transparent about our activities. Accordingly, a number of PIEN members, including members of the PIEN Committee, relate regularly to Jewish community groups. Others meet occasionally with leaders of the Jewish community in Australia.

18. How do we relate to the Palestinian community in Australia?

Primarily through our involvement with the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, in which Palestinian community groups in Australia are heavily involved. We also seek to relate to churches which draw membership from the Palestinian community.

19. What's the relevance of the Holocaust?

PIEN acknowledges the horror of the (Shoah) Holocaust with the killing of over 6 million Jewish people by the Nazis during the Second World War. We are particularly conscious of the fact that centuries of Christian antisemitism and previous misuse of Biblical texts were among the factors which contributed to the Holocaust. PIEN accepts that these horrific events - together with systematic persecution of Jewish communities over the centuries, particularly in central and Eastern Europe - reinforced a Jewish sense of insecurity and, inspired by Theodor Herzl, a desire for a Jewish homeland. PIEN recognises that these events, along with some earlier Western advocacy for a Jewish homeland, explains the strong international support in the late 1940s for the establishment of a State of Israel. At the same time, the Holocaust should not be used to justify the unjust actions of successive Israeli Governments against the Palestinians.

20. What's the relevance of the Nakba?

The Nakba (literally "catastrophe") is the Palestinian term for the events of 1948 following the establishment of the State of Israel. In the war that followed around 700,000 Palestinians had to flee from their homes and became refugees, over 400 Palestinian villages were destroyed or taken over by Israel and thousands of Palestinians were killed. There are now more than 5 million Palestinians registered as refugees, with 1.5 million of them living in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. The Nakba is commemorated every year on 15th May, the day after Israel formally declared its independence in 1948. PIEN's commitment to working for peace and justice for Palestine and Israel runs very deep because the dispossession and suffering of the Palestinians has now persisted for 71 years.

21. Are we guilty of antisemitism?

No. We are critical of the policies and practices of the Israeli Government towards the people of Palestine but that is far from the same thing as being prejudiced against all Jewish people. We want peace and security for the people of Israel and for the people of Palestine. But the current policies of the Israeli Government provide no peace and security for Palestinians and fail to contribute to long-term peace and security for Israelis, for those policies only deepen the understandable resentment and antagonism of Palestinians and work severely against the interests of a long-term peace.

22. What about Christian Zionism?

Christian Zionism is a political movement within Protestant fundamentalist Christianity, mainly based in the USA, that views the modern state of Israel as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, and which therefore provides Israel with generous and unconditional moral, political and financial support. PIEN believes that this interpretation of the Bible is wrong, that the theology which lies behind it is completely invalid. Christians should never support the sort of oppression, injustice, discrimination and mistreatment which Israel employs against the people of Palestine, yet that is what Christian Zionism supports. For further information see the blog of Bishop George Browning, President of the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, dated 16 January 2019, at <https://www.georgebrowning.com.au>. For excellent Biblical answers on this question, written by Rev Dr Stephen Sizer of the Church of England, see <http://www.stephensizer.com/articles/7answers.pdf>

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