

Israel and Palestine

Having repeatedly affirmed a vision of peace in the Holy Land and of Jerusalem as a city of two peoples and three faiths, the LWF is deeply concerned about continuing violence and injustice in Israel-Palestine. Present in the region through its member church—the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)—and through the Augusta Victoria Hospital and other field program activities, the LWF has observed developments in the area closely over a long period of time.

The LWF is convinced that a military response offers no solution to the violence and would only generate more conflict. The LWF condemns all attacks on the civilian populations as contrary to applicable international humanitarian law and fundamental ethical principles.

Dialogue, including between religious leaders and communities, is the only way to achieve peace. The LWF is committed to using all possibilities to promote dialogue for peace in the land where Jesus Christ was born.

[The Jerusalem program of the LWF Department for World Service](#) (DWS) has been helping the Palestinians of East Jerusalem and the West Bank for the past 55 years. Its work started with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and the subsequent Palestinian refugee crisis. In 1950, the [Augusta Victoria Hospital](#) (AVH), situated on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem, became a trust property of the LWF. The LWF has long enjoyed close cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which primarily assists people in the Palestinian territories. Approximately 75 percent of patients at the AVH originate from the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. The AVH is one of the main hospitals in the Palestinian territories.

[The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land](#) (ELCJHL), with congregations in Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories, has been a member of the LWF since 1974. During a press conference in Geneva in June 2001, the General Secretary of the LWF, Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, emphasized that the LWF has many reasons to speak out against injustice and violence in the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

A [resolution of the LWF Council](#) confirmed this stance: peace in the Middle East can only be brought about on the basis of international law, with special emphasis on humanitarian law. Furthermore, civil, political, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights of the Palestinians, including their right to self-determination, would need to be guaranteed.

In accordance with these fundamental principles, the LWF demanded an end to the illegal occupation and settlement of the Palestinian territories, and condemned attacks on the civilian population. The issue of the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories has become ever more central to the search for peace in the Holy Land. The LWF considers that the illegal settlements - whether in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank - are a fundamental obstacle to peace. Any proposal for the maintenance of some of those settlements must be negotiated with the Palestinian community.

In 2001, the LWF Council called for "an end to the illegal occupation of, and the illegal settlements in, the occupied Palestinian territories, as a fundamental and necessary step towards securing a just and sustainable peace for all peoples of the region." In 2002, the Council decided "to encourage member churches to consider promoting a boycott of the products of illegal Israeli settlements."

An updated [list of the products of illegal Israel settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories](#) can be found on the website of the Israeli 'Peace Now' movement.

According to a [letter by LWF General Secretary Noko](#) addressed to Yasser Arafat, the President of the Palestinian Authority, the degree to which infrastructure has been destroyed and the plight of the

population in Israel-Palestine was particularly apparent during a LWF Executive Committee visit to Ramallah in June 2002. In a [letter addressed to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon](#), Noko described the life situation of the Palestinian population as desperate and emphasized that giving these people a sense of hope was the only way for Israel to obtain security.

However, the LWF has always emphasized that hope and reconciliation can only be achieved through dialogue between the three world religions for which Jerusalem is a spiritual home. The LWF is committed to fostering dialogue at all levels in order to gain a better understanding of the political consequences of Jerusalem's spiritual meanings, and thus achieving peace. In a February 2004 statement entitled "Break Down the Wall," the LWF Executive Committee protested against the construction of a dividing wall in occupied Palestinian areas and condemned all arbitrary acts of violence targeted against civilians. The dividing wall could not bring about the peace that both the Israelis and Palestinians equally deserve. It represents a barrier to dialogue, mutual understanding, and a just peace.

Please click here for [additional information](#) about the situation in Israel-Palestine:

Please click here for a [special edition of the ELCJHL Newsletter](#) entitled:

"Plea for help from Christian Communities regarding the barrier between Israel and the West Bank of 24 November 2003."