

Mission Committee Resolution – Annexation of West Bank

At its June meeting, Mission Committee considered the threat posed by the Israeli government's proposed annexation of a significant part of the West Bank. In reaching a decision on a resolution, Mission Committee representatives, drawn from the URC's thirteen synods, were greatly helped by the direct experience afforded by participants on the denomination's recent educational visit to Israel and Palestine, just nine months earlier. This is a project which was conceived and overseen by the Mission Committee in response to Resolution 37 taken at the URC General Assembly 2016.

As part of the 2019 educational visit, participants joined in Sunday morning worship at St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem, led by Archbishop Suheil Dawani, who then gave a private audience to the URC group after the service. Last month, Archbishop Suheil Dawani, along with 12 other senior church leaders called on the Israeli Government not to annex land in the West Bank. Their joint statement expressed 'the utmost concern', expressing that the plans 'would bring about the loss of any remaining hope for the success of the peace process.'

During the visit, members of the 22-strong URC party were able to speak with many indigenous Christians, tour Christian Aid and Commitment for Life partnership projects and witness at first hand the everyday lived experiences of people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The narrative was one of inadequate water supply, intermittent provision of electricity, economic deprivation, unequal access to health care and severe restrictions on freedom of movement.

In the context of these daily challenges, there was a plea to share the prayers and the story of all that the participants had seen. Crucially, the group realised that this was not a conflict between faiths, but an outcry against the disproportionate actions of the Israeli Government. Annexation will only serve to increase the suffering of the Palestinian people.

General Assembly Resolution 37 from 2016 tasked the Mission Committee to 'enable synods, local churches and individuals to become more aware of the issues in Israel and Palestine' and then to **respond** with 'informed prayer, grace and solidarity'. It is in this spirit that Mission Committee strongly agreed to endorse the following resolution. It asks local churches (or indeed individual church members) to lobby their MPs to sign an all-party Early Day Motion, calling on the UK Government to exert pressure on the Israeli Government not to carry out the much-feared annexation:

Mission Committee Resolution – 4 June 2020

The United Reformed Church (URC) has a long history of informed interest in and practical partnership with Christian people and projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As the appointed Assembly Committee overseeing this engagement, the URC Mission Committee is deeply concerned by the proposals of the current Israeli political leaders that further areas of West Bank, Palestinian controlled and owned land, be annexed and brought under the jurisdiction of the Israeli Government. We strongly endorse the Early Day Motion (#464) tabled on 11 May 2020, which was signed by 69 MP's drawn from all political parties and call on the UK Government to take the action it outlines:

That this House notes with concern the plans of the new Israeli coalition government to annex part of the occupied West Bank; further notes that Israeli legislation can progress from 1 July 2020 to carry out such an annexation; highlights that any such annexation of territory occupied in 1967 is a breach of international law which rejects any acquisition of territory through force and that it would be a major threat to peace; notes that when Russia illegally annexed the Crimea in 2014, the UK joined EU

partners in imposing sanctions on that country; calls on the Government to make clear to the Israeli Government that such a step will have severe consequences for the UK-Israel relationship; and further calls on the Government to introduce sanctions similar to those imposed on Russia in the event that an annexation of occupied territory takes place.

Given the urgent nature of this issue, the URC Mission Committee encourages local churches to lobby MPs* who have not signed the Early Day Motion and request them to add their support.

* Here is the list of MP's who have signed the Early Day Motion <https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/56954/proposed-israeli-annexation-of-part-of-the-west-bank>