



“Towards humanity with a Kairos consciousness”

The Most Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams

**Lambeth Palace
London
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and

**The Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori
815 Second Avenue,
New York, NY, 10017**

Date: 13 May 2012

Your Grace and Presiding Bishop Katharine

Re: The more than 2000 Palestinian Hunger strikers

Greetings to you from South Africa.

My name is Edwin Arrison and I am an Anglican priest in South Africa, as well as the General Secretary of Kairos Southern Africa. We are connected to Kairos Palestine and other Kairos groupings throughout the world.

I write to you today because, in the 1980s, I was detained without trial in Apartheid South Africa and therefore I feel the pain and frustration of the Palestinian detainees at this time. Because of certain conditions imposed on us in prison, some of us went on a hunger strike and the longest period in which I went without food (although I consumed water throughout) was 4

days. I can remember the thoughts going through my mind during that time, particularly about dying for a just cause. I can also remember the anxiety that was expressed by family and friends at the time and the support we received from people in the international community, that certainly helped to sustain us and our families.

Today there are some Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike for more than 70 days! The worst part of all of this is that the “crime of silence” is once again being committed about the situation of the Palestinian people. Israel just has to say something like “they are members of a terrorist organisation” and that immediately seems to justify both their imprisonment and the silence around their hunger strike. In reality, it diminishes all of our humanity and all that we are supposed to stand for (human rights, democracy, etc) since these are God’s children too. Please remember that there was a time when the label of “terrorist” was also used by the Apartheid regime in South Africa against people such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and others. The fact that this hunger strike and several other actions by the Palestinians are non-violent seems not to be appreciated by those of us who express our abhorrence with violence: by refusing to support non-violent actions such as Boycotts, divestment and Sanctions, AND doing nothing else significant to show our support for non-violent actions, we are giving both justification and cover to those who use the tools of violence. Jesus would have called us out on our hypocrisy!

I am now therefore writing this urgent letter to the two of you (and copying Archbishop Thabo, Kairos Palestine and the Russell Tribunal on Palestine) since I believe this is the one time that we should be hearing your voices clearly. We have been disappointed at some of your statements regarding Palestine in the same way that Kairos theologians in South Africa expressed disappointment at the way some Church leaders were speaking about apartheid in the 1980s, as if there was symmetry between two equal parties. We all know that this is not the case and that Israel is the occupying power, having seemingly been given a *carte blanche* by both the USA and the UK. The USA could not even get itself to vote for a UN resolution on the settlements, and I am happy to see that you, Presiding Bishop, urged President Obama to vote for that very mild resolution.

The Holy Land is not just any other place on earth, and for us as Christians it and its people hold enormous significance. The “living stones” of the Holy

Land, all the people of that place and particularly the oppressed of that place, must be central in our prayers and our actions during this time. What is more is that our silence on the theological issues (God's covenant, his election, Zion, Israel etc) is corrosive of our faith, and I often wonder what is being taught at our seminaries and what is being preached from our pulpits? Also, to what extent are our young people looking at the silence of church leaders or their limited analyses and turning away from the Christian faith?

We all know that more fake "peace negotiations" will simply allow the situation to continue and worsen. With great respect to President Abbas, he does not seem to know how to move forward and is seen in some circles as nothing more than a Bantustan leader, his power ring-fenced and main purpose to serve the oppressing regime. For Israel it is important that he be as weak as possible and then they can say "We have no partner for peace". This is a game they have been playing these last many years.

President Abbas has been handed a toxic situation that could either lead to a third intifada or there could soon be a war with Iran, possibly to force President Obama's hand before the November presidential elections in the USA. Without trying to be unnecessarily alarmist, I can say that these are therefore extremely dangerous times that we live in and I am sure that you are aware of this. What I am not sure about is why you as leaders are so silent during this very dangerous Kairos time. I have enormous respect for you, but if I do not write this to you and try to bring this to your attention, I can also be accused of being complicit in the silence. And even if this hunger strike is resolved within the next few days, the other issues remain relevant.

In October this year the Russell Tribunal, a global citizen's initiative, will be meeting in New York to look at the issue of complicity. I am also sending this letter to them and asking them to make this and your responses to it part of the documentation of the next sitting of the Russell Tribunal. The church of Jesus Christ, who was born and lived in Palestine, cannot be silent about the injustice being meted out to the Palestinian people. There was also this general silence about Nazism and about apartheid, and now this silence must stop or we must cease calling ourselves followers of Jesus Christ, that young prophetic rabbi of 1st century Palestine.

I therefore call on you to urge Anglicans/Episcopalians across the UK, USA and the world, if this is possible, to fast on May 17 as an act of solidarity with the Palestinian people (this action is being initiated by several NGO's – please see

<https://www.popularstruggle.org/civCRM/petition/sign?sid=1&reset=1> , and to be part of the WCC Week of Prayers for Peace in Palestine and Israel from 28 May to 3 June.

I also urge you to call on the UK and USA governments to

1. Call for the unconditional release of all women, children and “administrative detention” political prisoners in Israel and Palestine
2. Call on your Ambassadors to monitor the situation carefully (we are writing to the government of South Africa to do the same)
3. Call on your governments to initiate a process that would lead to a cessation of the Occupation and to a **permanent** cessation of settlement building, also taking into account the Arab Peace Plan of 2002 (renewed in 2007) as the most realistic plan to accelerate peace in that region.

I look forward to your urgent response to this matter.

God bless.



Edwin Arrison (Rev) General-secretary

- Cc: The Most Rev Thabo Makgoba
- cc. Kairos Palestine office in Palestine
- cc. The Russell Tribunal Office in Belgium