



## **The Challenge of Jubilee**

“...to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives... recovery of sight to the blind ...to let the oppressed go free...to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Jubilee).”

The last fifty years have brought untold suffering upon our Palestinian people. Our only crime was to say ‘no’ to the occupation of our country and to resist it as an aberration and which is illegal under international law. Since 1967, the Israeli government has been oppressing the Palestinians and denying them their human and political rights.

In 2017, Palestinians will be marking 50 years since the loss of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. It is a fitting time to lift up the biblical concept of Jubilee when all those who were deeply in debt to others, enslaved by others, had their land forfeited to the stronger others, and were driven out from their agricultural lands by the militarily powerful others – to all those, in a Jubilee year, God expects and demands justice to be done. Their rightful ownership must be restored. God is a God of truth and justice; and justice and righteousness must be done in the land.

The challenge before us, at the 10<sup>th</sup> Sabeel International Conference, March 7-13, 2017, is to lift high, and focus on, the essence of the message of Jubilee. It is a message of hope for all the poor and oppressed of the land. It is a vision for the establishment of truth and justice for all the land and its inhabitants. It is an inclusive message so that peace and security can be achieved for all.

In its essence, this vision of Jubilee requires the following:

- The Israeli government needs to recognize the reality of the presence of the Palestinian people – Christians and Muslims in their land, Palestine. These inhabitants have been living in Palestine long before the establishment of the state of Israel. They are not here by accident. God willed for them to be here from time immemorial. They are the offspring of all the nations that inhabited the land for thousands of years.
- By denying occupation, Israel is putting its head in the sand. The whole world recognizes the illegality of the occupation, and yet Israel says there is no

occupation. Israel continues to live the lie that it can create facts on the ground that are irreversible. In fact, honesty and truth constitute the dawn of Jubilee.

- Israel needs to recognize that Palestinians have rights that Israel has taken away by force. These rights must be returned in accordance to justice in the eyes of God and in line with international law. These rights must be returned. This is the essence of the concept of Jubilee.
- The rights of the Palestinian refugees are enshrined and guaranteed by international law and by God's justice. The Jubilee demands their return and rehabilitation.
- The Palestinian prisoners, detainees, and all those held under administrative detention, must be released so they can return to their families and to their normal way of life. It is a return of their dignity and humanity that they were stripped of by Israel. This is Jubilee.
- The cancelation of debts is also a sign of Jubilee, especially those debts that have been incurred as a result of heavy fines imposed on Palestinians who are unjustly accused and indicted. This is Jubilee.
- Jubilee calls for the removal of all checkpoints and the tearing down of the apartheid wall and the guarantee of free access of Palestinians to Jerusalem and the rest of the country. It calls for the cessation of all measures to empty Jerusalem of its Palestinian population. This is what Jubilee means.

2017 is a Jubilee year because it allows us, as people of faith, to hear the cry of the oppressed in this land who have been denied freedom and to restore it to them. It allows the government of Israel to listen to God's voice, to the voice of the international community and to the voice of human morality and justice. God has created us free and it is a sin and a crime for Israel to shackle and imprison us.

God has proclaimed a Jubilee year to call us to repentance and responsibility. God is challenging us to respond to the demands of Jubilee. God is calling on the government of Israel to seize this Jubilee opportunity, to return to its senses, to take the initiative, and to implement the requirements of Jubilee. God is calling on the people of Israel to open their eyes and to listen to the voice of reason, morality, and justice. Above all, to listen to God's voice and proclaim liberation to all the people of the land for the benefit of all the people of the land. The psalmist wrote, "If you hear his voice harden not your hearts" (Psalm 95).

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