In response to the news reports of the March 25th, 2012, fundraising luncheon speech of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church’s comments, Sabeel published the following Open Letter.


An Open Letter to Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori
3 April 2012

Dear Bishop Schori,

Greetings from Jerusalem on this holy week in which we remember the passion and suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your words at the March 25th Los Angeles luncheon in which you emphatically said, invest in Palestine don’t divest from Israel reached us on Monday of Holy Week. Those words shocked and hurt us. They felt like nails hammered into our bodies and the truth of our reality, as though we Palestinians are living a lie -- only imagining things, and if we only eat, talk, and share our stories, everything will be alright. For twenty years now, that is exactly what we have been doing – eating, drinking, telling each other our stories, not to mention hugging and embracing, meanwhile Israel was feasting on our land. Your words sounded as someone who never came and never saw. As we go through holy week, we feel the ongoing agony, pain, and oppression of our people -- our homes demolished, our land confiscated, our olive trees uprooted, our human and political rights denied and our dignity trampled. After over 40 years of misery we only hear “the Episcopal Church does not endorse divestment or boycott.”

Economists’ reports, including the World Bank’s, have emphasized the futility of investment under occupation since all key aspects of a true economy are directly in the hands of Israel the occupier. Israel alone holds control of the area’s water, movement and access, every border, air-space, electricity, electromagnetic spectrum, and trade relations. Moreover, the Palestinians have recognized Israel (1988) and its right to exist (1993). They have renounced and denounced “terrorism” and accepted a Palestinian state on 22% of historic Palestine.

Yet, the occupation is not over. The settlements are expanding, our suffering continues, and the international community is unable to halt the injustice. Consequently, we see boycott, divestment, and sanctions as nonviolent direct action for the common good.

We thank God for those people – Christians, Muslims, and Jews who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Thank God for people of conscience who are lifting up their prophetic voice! Thank God for all those, religious and secular people that are standing with us in our nonviolent struggle.
By the mercy of God we will not allow the prophetic voice to die. Thank God for the prophetic voices of people who wrote comments after your words. Thank God for Bishop Desmond Tutu who was not afraid to speak the truth to the powers when he saw the oppression of the Palestinians and declared that it was worse than Apartheid in South Africa!

It is appropriate to recall Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to silence the disciples and the crowd who were shouting “Hosanna!” The word hosanna means save us now. It was the cry of oppressed people who were living under Roman occupation. They were looking for liberation from the yoke of the Romans. The powers were embarrassed and afraid of what the Roman soldiers might do as they were watching on. They turned to Jesus and said, “order them to stop.” Jesus’ response was, “if these were silent, the stones will shout out” (Luke 19:40).

If the church is afraid to cry out against injustice and oppression, the living stones, the common people will cry out. It is the cry of the widow to the unjust judge, “give me justice!” Ultimately, the future is for truth and justice because God is a God of truth and justice. It is only on such foundations that genuine peace can be built. It is not money that Palestinians need most, it is justice and liberation. Everything else will be added to us.

Next Sunday we will proclaim the victory of life over death, of justice over injustice, light over darkness, liberation over enslavement. We will continue to struggle for a just peace for all the people of our land.

Christ is Risen.

Naim Ateek
Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Jerusalem

cc. Bishop Suhail Dawani
Bishop J. Jon Bruno
International Friends of Sabeel Coordinators
Sabeel Board and General Assembly