

1. Juli 2020

Statement on the Annexation Plans of the Israeli Government

VELKD Bishops' Conference

The Bishops' Conference of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), convening on 19 June 2020, reacted with concern to the Israeli government's announced intention to annex parts of the West Bank. The bishops fear that this step will further exacerbate the political conflict situation in the Holy Land. Implementing the plans, they believe, would have fatal consequences for the future of the peace process in the Holy Land.

The Bishops' Conference reaffirms the statement by the Evangelical Middle East Commission (EMOK) of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). Besides VELKD, EMOK's membership comprises many German regional churches, mission associations, aid agencies and Christian organizations that maintain relations with the Middle East.

On the basis of the church's bonds with Judaism and, at the same time, in solidarity with the Christian churches in Israel and Palestine, EMOK on 28 May 2020 expressed criticism of the "current plans of the Israeli government, also included in the coalition treaty, to annex the Jordan Valley and other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Such an annexation would violate international law".

In agreement with the EMOK statement, the Bishops' Conference endorses the internationally recognized perspective of a two-state solution and supports EMOK's call upon

- the Israeli government to suspend [i.e. drop] the annexation plans it has agreed,
- the Palestinian leadership to end internal disagreements and to speak with *one* voice when opposing the annexation plans of the Israeli government,
- Israeli and Palestinian civil society to speak out against the annexation and advocate for negotiations,
- those with political responsibility in Israel and Palestine to resume negotiations to resolve the conflict,
- the German federal government, along with the European Union (EU) and its member states, to consistently advocate against the unilateral annexation of parts of the Palestinian West Bank by the Israeli government and to maintain their support for the peace process,
- the German federal government, in the context of its presidency of the Council of the European Union, to promote a central mediator role of the EU and to continue to work for a negotiated solution to the Israel-



Palestine conflict on the basis of international humanitarian law.

The Bishops' Conference expresses its solidarity with the Christians in the Holy Land. It supports the statement of the Council of Patriarchs and Holy Land Heads of Churches issued in Jerusalem on 7 May 2020 as well as the Pentecost 2020 appeal for "Liberation, not annexation" from VELKD's sister church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). Its Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar warns here that "annexation is not the way to reconciliation and living together for the people of this land". Instead, he writes, the ELCJHL has always "worked for a lasting and just peace between Palestine and Israel".

The VELKD member churches remain closely committed to the Holy Land and all those who live there. They will not cease to pray and work for peace and reconciliation.