

## **CA25.03.13. Social Policy Resolution “Toward Ending the Occupation of Palestine” — Congregation Guide**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) 2025 Churchwide Assembly adopted a social policy resolution (SPR) titled “Toward Ending the Occupation of Palestine.” This resolution provides grounding and guidance for congregational ministries, advocacy engagements, community education and church-to-church accompaniment for justice in Palestine and Israel. This congregation guide serves as a resource to shape understanding and inform ministry across ELCA congregations for justice in Palestine and Israel. This guide will:

- Define and contextualize the meaning and scope of the SPR.
- Strengthen accompaniment and partnerships.
- Provide structured pathways for congregational engagement.
- Encourage faithful witness and informed advocacy.

This guide will answer the following questions:

1. What is a resolution?
2. What does the CA25.03.13. social policy resolution “Toward Ending the Occupation in Palestine” mean?
3. What does this resolution reject?
4. Why does the ELCA’s global witness call us to respond to injustice when it happens outside the U.S. context?
5. How should this resolution inform and shape our ministry?

At the end of this resource, you will find a comprehensive glossary of important terms that provides further context and expertise.

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### **1. What is a resolution?**

Memorials and resolutions enable this church to address broad policy issues or issues important to God’s mission in the world. Memorials address broad policy issues; resolutions have a narrower focus, requesting consideration or action by individual offices or units or the Church Council. (A resolution can be the preferred method when an issue requires a timely response.) The churchwide organization and synods of the ELCA use a process to bring forth memorials and resolutions. Memorials and resolutions are one way this church addresses broad policy issues or important issues for God’s mission in the world. You can find more helpful resources about memorials and resolutions [here](#).

### **2. What does the SPR “Toward Ending the Occupation in Palestine” mean?**

This resolution refers to the term “[occupation](#)” in its title. The ELCA looks to international law to understand military occupation around the world, including in Palestine and Israel. International law establishes that military occupation is inherently temporary. This law establishes rules that are meant to govern the conduct of the occupying power. International law therefore mandates occupying powers to protect the human rights and well-being of the occupied population. The SPR utilizes international law and U.N. Security Council resolutions to address the ongoing violations of international law in Palestine and Israel and call on the wider ELCA to take concrete action in the name of upholding the sanctity and human rights of all peoples in the Holy Land.

In this resolution, you will also find the word “[genocide](#).” The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide formally defined the word genocide, and this is the definition the ELCA respects. This definition is not a matter of opinion; [it is a matter of meeting the requirements of this internationally agreed-upon definition](#). It is important to bear in mind the core of the definition, which is as follows: “*In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group ....*” With this resolution, the ELCA joins the United Nations and its affiliated bodies, international human rights organizations, and Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations in declaring that Israel’s war in Gaza, which started Oct. 8, 2023, does constitute genocide.

This resolution further addresses [Palestinian statehood](#), [U.S. military aid to Israel](#), settler violence, and makes a [clear distinction between the Jewish faith and policies of the Israeli government](#). The use of this terminology informs our ministry, worship and faithful witness as ELCA congregations walking in [accompaniment](#) with our Palestinian siblings in Christ. As directed by this resolution, ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton wrote a [letter](#) to U.S. President Donald Trump and utilized the language in this resolution to urge for humanitarian aid, a permanent ceasefire, a Palestinian sovereign state, and the realization and protection of human rights for all. Likewise, you are invited and empowered to use the language of this resolution and the language Bishop Eaton used in her letter in advocacy efforts, prayer, worship, and educational contexts to support faithful witness and action.

### **3. What is in this social policy resolution?**

This resolution equips ELCA congregations to strengthen advocacy, accompaniment and awareness in support of human rights, dignity and safety for all who live in the Holy Land. This resolution explicitly rejects promotion of harm or religious prejudice.

#### **To be clear:**

- This resolution affirms Israel’s right to exist alongside a sovereign Palestinian state as outlined by U.N. Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, 2334. It does not call for the destruction of the state of Israel.
- This resolution does not call for harm to any population, Palestinian or Israeli.

- This resolution does not change our [relationship to our siblings in the Jewish community](#).
- This resolution does not condone, support or promote violence from any group — past, present or future. It calls for peaceful resolution, a true and sustained ceasefire and humanitarian relief, all in accordance with international law.
- This resolution does not politicize religious identity. There is a clear distinction between government action and religious communities.
- This resolution does not align the ELCA with any national government, Palestinian or Israeli.

**Please strive to accurately represent the contents of this social policy resolution.**

**4. Why does the ELCA’s global witness call us to respond to injustice when it happens outside the U.S. context?**

Our ELCA social statement *For Peace in God’s World* reminds us that “*in praying for peace in the world, in interceding for all who suffer from war and injustice and for those in authority, the Church acts for peace.*” The CA25.03.13. social policy resolution draws upon ELCA social teachings and our reading of the gospel to direct our church body to intercede for all who suffer from war and injustice, adding specific context and language to inform our action and prayer for peace and justice in Palestine and Israel.

The ELCA is also a longtime partner of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), the only Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member in the Middle East and North Africa region. Through more than two decades of partnership, our ELCJHL Palestinian Lutheran sisters and brothers have communicated the impacts of a protracted Israeli military occupation on their ministry. We recognize that speaking out against the injustice they face is part of our commitment to them as partners and as siblings in Christ.

**5. How should this resolution inform and shape our ministry?**

This document empowers our ministry. When we speak out against the injustices of the Israeli government’s military occupation of the West Bank and ongoing genocide in Gaza, we have full backing of Churchwide Assembly-approved language and direction. Likewise, when we speak about the sanctity of every human life in the Holy Land, we have full backing of Churchwide Assembly-approved language and direction. This resolution provides framework and guidance for building awareness, advocacy and accompaniment in our faith communities. The ELCA Middle East North Africa (MENA) Desk’s [Sumud](#), the ELCA Witness in Society public policy team, the Arab and Middle East Ministry Desk, and Arab and Middle East Ministries are all named in this resolution as a source of resources, educational opportunities and advocacy.

**GLOSSARY**

**Definitions According to International Law:**

- **Military occupation**: The international humanitarian law apparatus, particularly [the Fourth Geneva Convention \(1949\)](#), establishes [strict obligations for occupying powers](#), including temporariness of occupation, protection of civilians, prohibition of settlement activity or transfer of settler population to occupied territories, and access to humanitarian aid.
  - How does this apply to Israel and Palestine? Israel’s prolonged occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza has been deemed illegal under international law because it violates these obligations through settlement expansion, forcible displacement, collective punishment and restrictions on freedom of movement.
    - The U.N. Security Council has repeatedly reaffirmed these violations through the following resolutions:
      - Resolution 242 (1967) calls for withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian territories occupied in the 1967 war.
      - Resolution 338 (1973) demands the implementation of 242 and negotiations for peace.
      - Resolution 2334 (2016) declares that Israeli settlements have “no legal validity” and constitute a “flagrant violation under international law.”
- **Genocide**: CA25.03.13 SPO “Toward Ending the Occupation of Palestine” invokes the term genocide, defined by the [1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#), which was ratified by the United States and Israel. Genocide requires evidence of both *acts* (killing, inflicting serious harm, creating conditions of destruction) and *intent* to destroy — in whole or in part — a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.
 

Multiple bodies have concluded that Israel’s actions in Gaza meet this definition, including:

  - [The International Court of Justice \(ICJ\) \(provisional measures, January 2024\)](#).
  - The [U.N. Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese’s formal report to the U.N. Human Rights Council](#).
  - [The International Association of Genocide Scholars \(2024 statement\)](#).
  - Prominent Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations ([B’Tselem](#)).
  - [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#), which had already found Israel to be committing *apartheid* before October 2023. [Amnesty](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) reporting have since highlighted genocidal patterns of conduct in Gaza.
- **Palestinian statehood**: the D4 Resolution reaffirms the right of both Israel and a sovereign state of Palestine to exist, which is grounded within U.N. resolutions:
  - [UNGA Resolution 3236 \(1974\)](#), which affirms the “*inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty*.”
  - Article 1(2) of the [U.N. Charter](#), which says the principle of self-determination is a cornerstone of international law. Today, more than [138 U.N. member states formally recognize the state of Palestine](#).

- **U.S. military aid to Israel:** This resolution highlights how the United States sustains Israel's protracted occupation and its violations of international humanitarian law through unrestricted military assistance.
  - The United States provides Israel with [\\$3.8 billion annually in military aid](#), the largest sum package to any country in the world. This aid persists despite binding U.S. laws:
    - The Leahy Law prohibits U.S. military assistance to any foreign military implicated in gross human rights violations (torture, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, rape, etc.).
    - The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 prohibits security assistance to governments that engage in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.
  - If the United States is committed to upholding both domestic human rights law and international humanitarian law, then continued military financing of Israel's occupation, settlement expansion and military operations in Gaza represents a breach of U.S. law as well as international legal norms and standards.
  - Calling this out strengthens the church's voice by showing that its position is not only theological but grounded in legal accountability mechanisms already codified in U.S. and international law.

#### General Definitions:

- **Judaism (faith) as distinct from the state of Israel**
  - The Jewish faith exists in diverse forms throughout the world, and the ELCA strongly opposes any forms of antisemitism, which cause harm to any Jewish person or community based on their Jewish faith and/or identity. This resolution distinguishes Judaism from the state of Israel as a means of disputing any and all conflation between the opposition to Israel's actions with prejudice against the Jewish community. This distinction aligns with the World Council of Churches' long-standing position on Israel and Palestine ([WCC statement](#)), which firmly rejects antisemitism while criticizing Israel's violations of international law.
    - By rejecting both antisemitism and Islamophobia, the ELCA situates its witness in line with international legal principles and human rights standards with the theological responsibility to defend the dignity of all peoples.
    - For U.S. Lutherans, this approach grounds advocacy in:
      - Solidarity with Palestinian Christians and Muslims (through partnerships with the ELCJHL).
      - Acknowledging and being mindful of the ELCA's long-standing relationship with numerous Jewish-American institutions and partnerships.

- Respect for Jewish communities worldwide.
- Opposition of unlawful Israeli state practices (prolonged occupation, genocide, settlements, annexation ...).
- **Accompaniment and Partnership**
  - The ELCA's Middle East Strategy and the MENA Desk and its Sumud initiative base all action and activity on accompaniment to ELCA partners on the ground in Palestine and Israel. This means our work is rooted in church-to-church relationship based on mutual respect and shared faith. Here are some ways this resolution reflects our spirit of accompaniment:
    - The presiding bishop wrote to the U.S. president ([letter sent August 2025](#)) calling for ceasefire, humanitarian aid, recognition of Palestinian sovereignty and protection of human rights.
    - The resolution reaffirms commitment to the ELCJHL, the LWF's Augusta Victoria Hospital and other partners.
    - The ELCA also resolves that the ELCA amplifies Indigenous voices, particularly Palestinian Christian Lutheran voices, ensuring that lived experience informs the church's advocacy and worship.