

The Larnaca Statement

January 2016

Preamble

We met together as a combined group of thirty Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, in Larnaca, Cyprus, for the second consultation of the Lausanne Initiative for Reconciliation in Israel/Palestine, January 25-28, 2016. We worshipped, prayed and studied the Scriptures together. We formed and deepened friendships as we ate and drank and talked together in the fellowship of the gospel.

We unanimously adopted the following statement, along with the commitments it includes, and we commend it for study, prayer and action.

The statement affirms our unity as believers in Jesus (section 1), calls for mutual commitment to live out that unity in the midst of conflict and division (section 2), recognizes areas of challenge and theological disagreement and identifies where further work needs to be done (section 3), proposes practical actions that express hope for the future, especially amongst the next generation of believers in both communities (section 4), and calls for prayer and support for this initiative from the wider family of believers.

1. We affirm our unity in the body of Messiah

- 1.1 Our unity has an intrinsically missional purpose, since Jesus prayed that we should be one in order that the world will believe the truth about Him.

²⁰“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17: 20-23)¹

- 1.2 Our unity is created by God through the Holy Spirit and we are commanded to maintain it in humility, gentleness, patience and love.

¹I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

(Ephesians 4:1-6)

- 1.3 Our unity embraces our diversity as Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians within the one body.

¹²Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—

¹ Bible quotations are from the NIV (2011).

whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

(1 Cor. 12:12-14).

- 1.4 Our unity was accomplished by the cross of Christ, by which the enmity between us has been abolished while retaining our distinctive identities.

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

(Ephesians 2:14-18)

- 1.5 Our unity is a condition of God's blessing on our communities

*¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!*

*² It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.*

*³ It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.*

*For there the Lord bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.*

(Psalm 133)

- 1.6 In the light of these and other Scriptures, we affirm the following paragraphs of the Cape Town Commitment:²

Love for one another in the family of God is not merely a desirable option but an inescapable command. Such love is the first evidence of obedience to the gospel, the necessary expression of our submission to Christ's Lordship, and a potent engine of world mission.³

We lament the dividedness and divisiveness of our churches and organizations. We deeply and urgently long for all followers of Jesus to cultivate a spirit of grace and to be obedient to Paul's command to "make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

- 1.7 In the context of our conflicting perceptions and opinions, we nevertheless affirm our wholehearted assent to these convictions:

- We are united in our faith in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, Saviour and Lord, and in the Good News of the Kingdom of God, which He preached, and for which He lived, died and rose again.

² The Cape Town Commitment is the statement of the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, held in Cape Town, South Africa in October 2010.

³ 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 John 4:11; Ephesians 5:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 4:9-10; John 13:35

- We are united in the Body of Christ as a result of His reconciling work on the cross, and in our diversity we are all, equally and together, members of the one household of God.
- We belong together as one family;
 - we are committed to love and serve one another;
 - we need each other;
 - we share one another's suffering as members of one body.

2. We commit ourselves to live out that unity in the midst of conflict and division, and we call on our communities to join us in this commitment

2.1 In times of tension and violent conflict, relationships suffer, while suspicion, accusation and mutual rejection thrive. At such times it is even more essential that we who affirm our unity in the Messiah must uphold ethical standards of life that are worthy of our calling, in all our attitudes, words and deeds.

2.2 We recognize that we hold very different theological positions regarding the land, and also very different perspectives on the causes of the social, political and economic realities that impact the daily life of all who inhabit the land. Those realities include a range of disputed issues (such as: security; the occupation of the West Bank; Gaza; equality of citizenship in Israel; refugees; acts of lethal violence; the search for justice and peace, etc.).

2.3 Nevertheless, we insist that, whatever our theology or our views of current realities, we are called to live by the commands of Scripture and the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, even when we legitimately challenge one another in these areas. Conversely, we deplore those ways of speaking and acting that are incompatible with obedience to our Lord, and for which we need to repent.

2.4 Accordingly, we make the following commitments:

2.4.1 We will accept one another as God in Christ has accepted us, in spite of theological differences and disputed matters (Rom. 15:7). We also accept the responsibility this entails:

- to affirm and respect one another;
- to treat one another as brothers and sisters in the body of the Messiah at all times and circumstances;
- to seek to listen and understand even when we cannot agree;
- to behave towards one another with love, gentleness and patience.

2.4.2 We will refuse to denounce, dehumanize, or demonise one another or our respective communities. We will not "bear false witness against our neighbours", "spread false reports" or "follow the crowd in doing wrong" (Exodus 20:16; 23:1-2). We will refrain from spreading gossip, rumours, slander, unfounded allegations and lies - whether by word of mouth, in print, or by social media, blogs, etc.

2.4.3 We will obey the instructions of Jesus in Matthew 18 in circumstances of dispute between brothers and sisters in our respective communities. We will not go public with our grievances against a brother or sister, or the ministries or organizations they represent, until we have spoken to them personally, and prayerfully addressed the issues along with other mature disciples of Christ.

2.4.4 We will pray for one another, seeking to look to the best interests of others rather than our own, bearing one another's burdens, actively encouraging one another's ministries and missional outreach, developing friendships and networks, and exploring ways to work together in gospel fellowship wherever possible.

2.4.5 We will make every effort to maintain our fellowship with each other as a witness to the unity of the body of the Messiah and to the boundless love of God for all people.

2.4.6 When we engage in legitimate challenge of one another's actions, positions or teachings, we will do so in a manner compatible with the commitments above.

3. We recognize the following areas of challenge and disagreement.

While there is a need for further theological reflection and collaborative action in all the following areas, nevertheless we believe that our unity in the household of God challenges us also to make some common affirmations and mutual commitments in relation to them.

3.1 Understanding our different narratives

As Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, we recognize that our historical narratives are often in conflict with each other and in many cases are mutually exclusive, particularly in relationship to the events of the past 100 years and the establishment of the state of Israel and the events leading up to it.

Many Messianic Jews see the return of the Jews to the land and the establishment of the state of Israel as a sign of God's faithfulness to His people Israel. Many see Israel's control over the territories as necessary to maintain security and prevent further escalation, and some see it as part of God's promise to greater Israel, and view military service as a duty to their country.

Many Palestinian Christians see the presence of the Christian church in their land as a testimony to the faithfulness of God, and the establishment of the state of Israel as a catastrophe for their people. They see the Palestinian refugee problem, the lack of equality within Israel, the ongoing occupation, and the expansion of settlements on Palestinian land, as illegal and unjust. They perceive their survival and duty to involve resistance to these injustices by peaceful, legal and non-violent means.

In spite of our different views, we commit ourselves to listen to one another, to learn from and respectfully challenge the narrative of the other, to critically evaluate our own narrative and to work towards an inclusive, bridging narrative.

3.2 Recognizing our social identities

In the context of social and political conflict, we face the challenge of accepting and respecting each other's identities. Our self-definition as Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians should not prevent us from accepting the legitimacy of the other. We must recognize our mutual belonging within the body of the Messiah as we live in our divided societies.

3.3 *Enlarging our theologies*

3.3.1 We recognize that there are deeply held theological convictions on both sides, which, in the minds and hearts of those who hold them, are justified on the grounds of biblical exegesis and interpretation. All of us affirm that we submit to the authority of Scripture in both Testaments as a necessary dimension of our submission to Jesus as Messiah and Lord. All of us seek to understand and interpret Scripture as faithfully as we are able and to apply it to our context and the issues it raises. Yet we disagree at some fundamental points.

3.3.2 We intend to listen more carefully to one another, so as to understand deeply even when we disagree. We will refrain from dismissive labeling of views that differ from our own as an excuse to avoid engaging with them on the foundation of careful, respectful, and mutually critical biblical exegesis. We will recognize that what for either community is a theological axiom can become the cause of pain for the other community, in the denial of identity or rights.

3.3.3 Even though we are convinced of our own positions and wish to continue to dialogue with and challenge one another, we will not require others to change their position and accept ours as a pre-condition of our fellowship. Rather we call for a generous theological stance, which makes room for and respects the conscientious convictions of others that they sincerely derive from their reading of Scripture. We commit ourselves to clarify our positions in situations where they might be interpreted in a way that harms or excludes others. We are also entitled to require the same from others.

3.3.4 For example:

Some of us believe that the uncanceled covenant of God with Israel continues to include the promise of the land to the Jewish people as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that the return of Jews to the land and the establishment of the state of Israel constitute the fulfillment of biblical prophecies. We reject, however, the interpretation of this theological conviction that denies the identity, history and peoplehood of the Palestinians and their right to remain in the land of their ancestors. And we acknowledge and lament along with them the suffering, death and injustice caused by that denial.

Some of us believe that all God's covenant promises, including the land, are fulfilled in the Messiah Jesus as the One who embodies the true sonship and inheritance of Israel, embracing the whole earth and all nations. All those from any nation who are united to Christ by faith share in the inheritance that is His and are the seed of Abraham and heirs according to God's promise. We reject, however, the interpretation of this theological conviction that denies the right of Jews to a secure homeland and rejects the reality and legitimacy of the state of Israel. And we acknowledge and lament along with them the suffering and death caused by the hatred and violence of those who seek to destroy it.

Other theological issues need to be addressed and worked on in a comparable spirit.

4. As believers in Jesus, we renew our biblically-grounded hope for the future, we affirm our belief that the gospel can change people and situations, and we accept that we have a role to play in this process.

We commit ourselves to the following intentions and actions:

- 4.1 To be advocates for each other in our communities, especially during times of increased violence;
- 4.2 To create a safe and private platform to maintain communication between us.
- 4.3 To make our best efforts to meet in friendship;
- 4.4 To seek and receive information about the conflict from each other rather than relying only on our media;
- 4.5 To be aware of the major role that social media play in our conflict, and therefore to be sensitive, honest and open in our use of social media and to maintain communication with one another;
- 4.6 To remember and acknowledge the limitations and potential dangers of non-direct communication;
- 4.7 To consult with one another during our process of making decisions that could directly affect our brothers and sisters on the other side;
- 4.8 To discuss our role in reconciliation within our own communities, especially those of us who are emerging leaders of the present generation;
- 4.9 To invite and challenge our peers and leaders to engage in healthy dialogue and reconciliation;
- 4.10 To pray for ourselves, for our authorities and for each other the following prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.

Prayer of Peace – Francis of Assisi

Conclusion

We invite both our communities in the land and outside it, along with the worldwide family of God, to join us in prayer, both that we may be faithful to the affirmations and commitments expressed here, and that the ongoing work of this initiative may bear fruit for the kingdom of God and His glory.

All of us who participated in the consultation agreed with and endorsed this *Larnaca Statement*. Some of us, due to the sensitivity of the context or for personal reasons, have preferred to withhold our names.

<i>Steering Committee</i>	Najed Azzam	Mazan Nasrawi
Richard Harvey (<i>co-chair</i>)	Yoel Ben David	Toumeh Odeh
Munther Isaac (<i>co-chair</i>)	Jamie Cowen	Rasha Saba
Lisa Loden	Bishara Dib	Rawan Sabbah
Botrus Mansour	Eli Dorfman	Albert Saliba
Salim Munayer	Danny Kopp	Shadia Qubti
<i>Other participants</i>	Neeman Melamed	Sharona Weiss
Saleem Anfous	Jack Munayer	David Zadok