

Christmas 2023

Dear friends,

This year was personally a very happy one. The most encouraging thing was that my 11th foot operation finally stabilized my artificial ankle and I have been walking without pain and crutches ever since. Signs and wonders still happen. My wife Ulrike and I also had many other good experiences together, including the celebration of our Diamond wedding anniversary (60 years) with our children and grandchildren.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGxFl_pd_bE

On the other hand, the global political situation is weighing heavily on us. Not to mention the climate catastrophe, Ukraine has been put in a terrible situation. It was only in the course of this catastrophe that we learned that it had been a strategic goal of the USA since 1991/92 to prevent a Europe/Russia common security system from emerging outside NATO (Chomsky). In line with this, the USA and England also stopped the ceasefire agreement between the warring parties in March 22 and have since been focusing on victory over Russia, arms deliveries and dying people. And the German government is joining in. Ulrike and I, together with a group led by former SPD MP Lothar Binding, are trying to strengthen the voices for peace in Heidelberg.

My main concern remains Palestine-Israel. In the follow-up to the WCC Assembly, we published four brochures as Kairos Palestine Solidarity Network and, together with my US friend Mark Braverman, I published a collection of essays under the title: *Interreligious Solidarity for Justice in Palestine-Israel Volume 2 – Ecumenical Response to Violations of International Law* in German (the English version will follow, published by the WCC). With this material (see <https://kairoseuropa.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/KPS-Flyer-Buch-4-Broschueren-FINAL.pdf>) we are now inviting congregations to four-part seminars, for which we also provide speakers. On the occasion of the Kirchentag, which unfortunately banned an exhibition on the Nakba, we organized a well-attended one day conference on Palestine-Israel off-site in Nuremberg. In November, together with the political economist Shir Hever from Israel, I also gave a compound seminar at the university of Heidelberg on "Understanding the pain of others – 75 years of the founding of the state of Israel and the Nakba of the Palestinian people from a historical, political and theological perspective". Finally, I have recently been asked to organize a workshop on *Israel as an apartheid state* at the Peace Council in Kassel.

In addition, Kairos Europa had invited me to a meeting of a network, called Casa Común, which was founded at last year's General Assembly of the WCC and at which, 40 years after the General Assembly in Vancouver, the continuation of the conciliar process for justice, peace and creation was on the agenda. Climate and the need to overcome imperial capitalism were once again the focus. Finally, 20 years after the Accra Confession against imperial capitalism, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (formerly the World Alliance of Reformed Churches) invited me to a conference in Jakarta to re-read the signs of the times. As we know, these signs point to a highly dangerous situation for humanity. The explosion of violence around and in Gaza has now been added to the list of nightmarish events – the new climax of a 75-year history of violence by Zionist settler colonialism, for which the USA and Germany are particularly co-responsible because they support Israel's violations of international law politically and financially. We can only hope against hope that these events will be understood as a wake-up call.

Our friends in Bethlehem have canceled their Christmas celebrations and set up a manger scene instead: "Jesus under the rubble" (see photo above). May the baby Jesus not be buried under rubble again in 2024 and may a little more peace grow in justice.

Ulrich