



Peacemaking at General Assembly

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship is a national community of Presbyterians who trust in the nonviolent Jesus Christ. We call forth and celebrate prophetic action by individuals and by our denomination in the search for alternatives to violence, exploitation, militarism and war. Through the decades, across generations and in the changing circumstances of history, this is our trust and our task.

Iraq

Five overtures and a resolution addressing the continuing war in Iraq will dominate the agenda of the General Assembly Peacemaking and International Issues Committee. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) has prepared **"Costly Lessons of the Iraq War: Resolution with Recommendations and Study Paper,"** and the presbyteries of Atlanta (with a concurrence from Hudson River), Baltimore (along with Chicago, Santa Fe, and Twin Cities), and Heartland have submitted overtures.

The Heartland proposal, **"On Ending the War in Iraq,"** is by far the weakest, calling only for more U.N. and international involvement in Iraq's security, pastoral care for military personnel, funding for rebuilding, and support for ministries to address human needs. It would add nothing to the most recent G.A. statement of 2004, which lacked specific policy points to guide Presbyterians in their advocacy efforts.

The Atlanta overture, **"On the Withdrawal of U.S. Troops from Iraq,"** contains all of the points of the Heartland one, and adds a strong request to "the United States government to develop and implement a specific timetable for the withdrawal of United States military forces." It touches on the important issue of permanent bases by asking us to advocate for the "complete withdrawal of United States military forces...."

"On Building Peace in Iraq," from Baltimore, is by far the strongest of the overtures, especially in its "call upon the government of the United States to end its military presence in Iraq by withdrawing all troops, hired soldiers, and contractors, and permanently closing all military bases in Iraq." It honors conscientious objectors and those who engage in nonviolent direct action for peace. It is also more detailed and specific in addressing veterans' needs, how to internationalize Iraq's security, and steps to be taken in the war's aftermath. These steps would include repairing environmental damage, investigating war crimes, and engaging in a truth and reconciliation process similar to the successful ones in South Africa and El Salvador. Several PPF members contributed to the development of this overture.

The ACSWP resolution is very strong, although a bit less firm in insisting on a total withdrawal of U.S. forces. It asks for "the swiftest possible internationalization of the occupation of Iraq under UN aegis, to improve security (removing U.S. troops as a focus of violence)..." and "a plan to conclude major military operations in a responsible and expeditious manner, leading to the

withdrawal of virtually all U.S. forces and the international use for peace and reconstruction of fourteen bases built by U.S. contractors." Perhaps a helpful commissioner will try to remove the words "major" and "virtually all."

The resolution's language is moderate, using "plan" instead of "timetable," and avoiding possibly controversial language about war crimes, restitution, and truth commissions. However, it calls for comprehensive measures for achieving justice, restoration, and accountability in the war's aftermath. It also includes program initiatives for the church: a review of peace studies programs and peacemaking opportunities in colleges and seminaries and the authorization of interfaith peace witnesses.

A final recommendation to create and fund a new version of the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace, a cold war era think tank, raises questions by choosing a model from such a distant and different time. The proposal should be clarified to define the role of churches as advocates for a demilitarized foreign policy based on effective diplomatic initiatives and international cooperation through the United Nations.

The included study paper, written by Edward Long, Jr. and Gary Dorrien, contains a substantive review of the issues raised by the Iraq War and, if an appropriate study guide is prepared, will be useful for adult study groups as well as college and seminary classes.

Two overtures focus on particular problems of the Iraq war - the plight of refugees and violence against women. **"Regarding Assistance for Iraqi Refugees,"** from the Presbytery of Lake Huron, calls for quickly resettling Iraqi refugees in the U.S. This overture is worthy of support, and places major responsibility for dealing with the refugee crisis where it belongs, with the United States, the main creator of the crisis.

"Addressing the Violence and Suffering Inflicted on Iraqi Women During the Current Prolonged War," from Providence Presbytery, calls attention to abuses against Iraqi women, which have increased in recent years. This is a real problem, especially since many war crimes target women and other vulnerable victims such as children and the elderly. However, a close reading of the overture shows that it places much of the blame on Islamic fundamentalism, rather than the war itself; and the Iraqi government, as if that government were truly sovereign. If this overture is to be supported, the recommendations should be revised to direct more

advocacy to correcting the abuses against women and all Iraqis caused by the occupation.

The General Assembly should not consider passing either of these overtures unless they are part of a

comprehensive position on Iraq, addressing all of the issues included in the Baltimore and Atlanta overtures and in the "Costly Lessons" resolution.

Mercenaries, Conscientious Objectors, and the Abolition of War

Three other overtures deal with issues pertinent to but much bigger than the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. "**On War, Mercenaries, and Profiteering**," from Scioto Valley Presbytery, makes the point that "it is immoral to wage war or kill for money, even assuming the war or conflict is just." It notes the impunity of military contractors, who have evaded prosecution or accountability for their roles in the massacre of seventeen Iraqi civilians by military contractor Blackwater USA, the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, or other human rights abuses, even where military enlisted personnel involved are now in prison. The overture asks that use of military contractors be prohibited, and that violations of human rights by these mercenaries be investigated, prosecuted, and punished.

The Presbytery of San Francisco has submitted "**On Supporting Those Who Feel Called to Seek Status as Conscientious Objectors**." This overture reaffirms the long-standing denominational recognition of the validity of a C.O. position, and reminds us of the procedures for registering with the Stated Clerk. It also requests some programmatic support for the policy in the form of study guides, educational opportunities, and C.O. support structures at all levels of the church. Now is the right time for such renewed attention to the freedom of conscience position of the PC(USA).

Israel/Palestine

Although the past two General Assemblies have made significant statements on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the topic continues to generate a significant number of overtures. The steering committee of the Israel/Palestine mission network has prepared the following guidance, based on prayer, study and research covering hundreds of resources as well as travel in the Middle East to hear diverse perspectives from Israelis, Palestinians and local Christian leaders:

The Military Occupation - It is our firm belief that peace and justice for both Israel and Palestine cannot be achieved until the 40 year military occupation of Palestinian lands comes to an end.

The Wall, Checkpoints, and Curfews - This military occupation is further articulated by a 436 mile wall and hundreds of check points and road blocks, many miles of which encroach upon Palestinian lands. The result is that Palestinians are forcibly separated from one another and are denied access to employment, education, medical care, natural resources, adequate food and basic needs. Curfews prevent Palestinians from going to work, sending their children to school or even leaving their homes for weeks and months at a time depending upon the whim of the occupying military regime.

Denial of Ownership and Home Demolitions - From 2000-2007, 94% of all building permit requests by

"On Peacemaking and the Pursuit of Justice and Fairness of Shalom," from Twin Cities Presbytery, really tries to cover it all. Here are the recommendations (all of them):

1. Stand for constructive national and international policies based on peacemaking and the pursuit of justice and fairness of shalom;
2. Stand for international communication and cooperation, for conflict resolution by non-violent means, and for the enforcement of international law as formulated in the United National Charter, international treaties, and agreements;
3. Support efforts to abolish war and to oppose the doctrine of preemptive war;
4. Promote civil liberties and rights to due process; and
5. Oppose torture and degrading treatment of human beings, and support efforts for the promotion of human rights.

This very general overture could prove a useful policy foundation for Presbyterians wishing to advocate against almost any future preemptive military action, possibly against Iran, Venezuela, or our next "enemy."

West Bank Palestinians have been denied (only 91 of 1,624 requests being allowed). By contrast, 18,472 apartments and homes were built in Jewish West Bank settlements in that same period of time. Palestinians who choose to build, or simply add an addition to their homes without the necessary permit often find themselves on an Israeli government list of Palestinian homes scheduled for total demolition. Since 2000, 4,747 Palestinian homes have been completely destroyed (18,147 since 1967). Sometimes the events result not only in the loss of Palestinian property, but life as well.

Construction of Illegal Israeli Settlements on Palestinian Land. It is against international law for nations to construct permanent settlements on occupied land. Both Israel and the United States are signatories of the 1949 Geneva Convention which clearly prohibits this. Even so, nearly 500,000 Israelis have been moved into such settlements and are protected by Israeli political and military power. In the sixty year history of Israel, every elected Prime Minister has presided over the construction of these settlements contrary to its signed agreements.

People Without a Country. Israel maintains a system in which Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have neither the privilege of Israeli citizenship nor the freedom to be citizens of their own nation. Palestinians literally exist as a people without a country. In addition, the territory in which they live is divided into cantons

ensuring that Palestine is not contiguous, and can never be, *thus eliminating the possibility that a two state solution could ever exist.* In this context, millions of Palestinians are controlled by an occupying military force that imposes collective punishment on an arbitrary and routine basis.

Violence does occur on both sides of this conflict, but its victims are disproportionately Palestinian.

According to the Israeli human rights group, B'Tselem, at the beginning of 2008 there were 8,436 Palestinian prisoners (most being held without charge) and only 3 Israeli prisoners; 668 Palestinians (overwhelmingly women and children) have been killed in Gaza by Israel over the past two years compared with 13 Israeli dead.

We endorse the following overtures:

Overture 07-01 *On Calling for Tolerance and Peaceful Relations Between the Christian and Muslim Communities* (Newton Presbytery). This overture calls for dialogue among three faiths: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Given our global interconnectedness, dialogue at home impacts peace and justice across the world.

Overture 11-01 *On Peace and Justice in Israel Palestine* (Greater Atlanta Presbytery). This overture calls for intentional study and dialogue throughout the PC(USA) and beyond concerning the conflict in Israel/Palestine. This is an important and necessary first step towards deeper understanding about what makes for peace and justice in that region.

Overture 11-02 *On Pursuing a Culture of Just Peace in Israel and Palestine* (Chicago Presbytery). A “Just Peace” here is defined by the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the newly formed United Nations in 1949 to ensure that the Jewish holocaust not be repeated. It applies equally to all factions, countries, and peoples.

Overture 11-03 *On Endorsing the Amman Call* (Susquehanna Valley Presbytery). From an ecumenical conference in Amman, Jordan, in June 2007, the Christian Churches in the Middle East appeal to our General Assembly to take significant actions in our policies for seeking a just Israeli-Palestinian peace, in both ecumenical and interfaith contexts, thus assuring them that we are, in Christ, their partners in this important work.

Overture 11-04 *On Travel to Israel/Palestine* (East Iowa Presbytery). This overture provides guidelines and resources for Presbyterians planning travel to the Holy Land in keeping with the peacemaking goals of our church and requests more PC(USA)-organized trips for regional teams.

Overture 11-07 *On Supporting Israel’s Right to Exist, But Calling for Temporary Suspension of Military Aid to the State of Israel* (Newark Presbytery). While this overture supports Israel’s right to existence, it exercises tough love in calling for the federal government to enforce the U.S. Foreign Assistance, and Arms Export Control Acts which prohibit recipients from using U.S. aid and weaponry in the commission of human rights violations.

Overture 11-23 *On Divestment from Caterpillar, Inc., and Motorola, Inc. for Profiteering from Israeli Military Occupation of Palestinian Territories* (San Francisco Presbytery). This overture calls upon the PC(USA) Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee to report on the compliance or lack thereof by the named corporations in regard to General Assembly guidelines on responsible investment, and if necessary, to require the General Assembly Council to act in accordance with those guidelines. Commissioners should note that this overture has to do with divesting Presbyterian assets from two named companies that sell military weaponry and technology to Israel which is then used to violate human rights in Palestine. It has nothing to do with divesting from any other American corporations that do business in and with Israel. Neither does it call for “boycotting Israel” as has been falsely claimed in the past.

We do NOT support the following overtures:

Overture 11-06 *On the 218th General Assembly Being a Voice for the Victims of Violence in Israel and Palestine* (National Capital Presbytery). While we embrace the spirit of this overture’s concern for both peoples, we are troubled by the fact that it focuses on ending violence without acknowledging that one side continues its military occupation of the other, imposing debilitating restrictions on the local population and illegally expanding settlements. This overture either ignores or denies that one side completely dominates the conditions it says makes for peace.

Overture 11-25 *On Becoming Non-Partisan Advocates for Peace* (Santa Barbara Presbytery)

Overture 11-26 *On Middle East Peacemaking* (Santa Barbara Presbytery)

Both overtures address the Israeli/Palestinian conflict by calling upon the PC(USA) to be non-partisan advocates for peace. Specifically, Overture 11-26 calls upon our church to “defer from taking actions or making statements that align the Presbyterian Church (USA) with unilateral support for any of the specific parties involved in the struggle.” The overtures we endorse above provide the most effective means in achieving peace for both sides in this conflict and do not advocate unilateral support of one side over the other. These overtures do recognize, however, that Israel’s military occupation and absolute control of Palestine supports the ongoing seizure of, and settlement in Palestinian lands, along with the violation of human rights that occurs as a result. This makes a just peace agreement impossible. The advocacy of the Presbyterian Church (USA) calling upon the United States and Israeli governments to do what is necessary to create a just two-state solution is indispensable in achieving a permanent peace agreement. Voting in favor of the overtures we endorse will accomplish this and render moot the concerns of these two overtures from Santa Barbara.

Colombia

In 2006, the Birmingham General Assembly considered a Commissioners' Resolution on Colombia that contained an endorsement of the accompaniment program as well as a number of policy points. The assembly passed most of the resolution, but referred the list of peacemaking advocacy items to the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) with a request to include a report in their next human rights update report. ACSWP has responded to this referral with a request for approval for all of the actions recommended by the original Commissioners' Resolution. These include diversion of military aid to humanitarian purposes, ending aerial fumigation of coca crops, and support for United Nations programs in Colombia.

Although this item is titled, "**Report on Human Rights in Colombia**," it is more than that, both because of the advocacy action items and because it also calls for suspending military aid to the Philippines, noting "the significant parallels between the pattern of violence in Colombia and the pattern in the Philippines, another major recipient of U. S. antiterrorism training and technology." Presbyterian Peace Fellowship moderator Roger Powers, a G.A. commissioner who participated in PPF's recent delegation to the Philippines, is drafting a commissioners' resolution on human rights in the Philippines. This C.R. will give the G.A. the option of addressing the two countries in separate reports.

An overture from the Presbytery of Chicago, "**On Peacemaking in Colombia**," contains very similar material, with the significant addition of strong opposition to the Colombia Free Trade Agreement. While election-year politics have kept this agreement from passing so far, we can expect to see it before Congress again. The

The United States

General Assembly Committee 9, Social Justice Issues, will also have peacemaking items on its agenda. Of particular interest to the Peace Fellowship is the overture "**On Addressing the Tragedy of America's Gun Violence**," from National Capital Presbytery. This overture would increase accountability for gun purchases through closing the gun show loophole and using new technologies such as microstamping of cartridges. It calls for study, worship, and advocacy at all levels of the church. A very interesting proposal in the overture would "direct the Office of Theology and Worship, in consultation with the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, to prepare a statement articulating a Reformed theology of proactive, constructive nonviolence as way of life and tactical method for bringing God's justice and peace in our communities and around the world."

"**A Social Creed for the Twenty-First Century and Recognition of the Centennial of the 'Social Creed of the Churches' of 1908**" offers this General Assembly the opportunity of making a comprehensive social justice statement that includes far more than the labor issues of the original 1908 document. The peacemaking statements

overture's rationale provides an excellent briefing on the Free Trade Agreement's potential for additional declines in human rights in Colombia.

In their clear opposition to military aid of all kinds, both of these items implicitly reinforce the church's long-standing opposition to the particular form of military aid that involves bringing Colombian military personnel to the United States for training at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), formerly called the School of the Americas. Last year, two events in Colombia emphasized the continuing risks of supporting the Colombian Army through this program. In August, two WHINSEC instructors from Colombia were arrested and charged with providing security and military support for one of Colombia's most notorious drug cartels. In May, a former paramilitary commander testified in a closed hearing that six of Colombia's highest ranking military leaders, including 4 generals, had aided paramilitary groups in training and logistics, and had incited and promoted paramilitary intervention in certain regions of Colombia. All six had received training in the United States at taxpayer expense.

Although General Assembly will be asked to consider little in the way of new policy on Colombia, it will have an important opportunity to recommit the church to the struggle for peace, justice, and human rights. Approving both the report and the overture will encourage the many accompaniment program volunteers and our partners in the Colombian Presbyterian Church who are working on these issues every day, often in dangerous conditions.

could be strengthened: they call for "peacemaking through multilateral diplomacy rather than unilateral force, the abolition of torture, and a strengthening of the United Nations and the rule of international law," and "nuclear disarmament and redirection of military spending to more peaceful and productive uses." We need disarmament that goes far beyond nuclear weapons. We need a United Nations that is not only stronger, but one that is truly respected by the United States. And the warning against "unilateral force" does not go far enough in condemning the convenient international coalitions assembled by our recent administrations whenever they have wanted to invade another nation.

The creed calls for ending the death penalty and rehabilitating criminals. It fails to address the criminal justice issues caused by a war on drugs that is misdirected toward military action in foreign countries instead of emphasizing treatment and prevention programs; and it fails to address the crime caused by easy access to guns. But perhaps these additional steps will have to wait for the next creed, in 2108.