

The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship: Principles to Guide our Work
The Conflict between Israel and Palestine – Approved May 24, 2010

The PPF has had a long and abiding interest in and concern for the Middle East, grounded in the experience of several members of our National Committee who have spent years living, teaching and working in support of the Christian churches there and for a just peace for all in the region. In 2001, we began sponsoring delegations to Israel and Palestine in an effort to deepen our understanding of the growing crisis there, exemplified by widespread, devastating economic insecurity and the loss of self-determination in Palestine, as well as the growing fear of violence felt by both Israelis and Palestinians.

There are many possibilities for action before the General Assembly that will meet in July, 2010. Finding a clear and consistent path through the complexity and emotion of overtures and reports such as these is never easy. We offer these principles that guide our own work with the prayer that they might also help to guide commissioners in their deliberations as they seek to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit.

The beliefs and commitments that are the basis for our response to Israel and Palestine:

Our responsibility to our Jewish sisters and brothers:

We believe that Christians bear a significant responsibility to listen to, respect and strive to understand the history of the Jewish people, and the ways in which Christians so often have been perpetrators of violence against Jews throughout our two thousand year history. We are particularly aware of the ugly, horrific reality of the Holocaust and seek to be sensitive to its impact on Jews both in Israel and around the world. It is impossible for us to fully comprehend the insecurity felt by the Jewish people in the wake of the murder of six million Jews just a generation ago.

We recognize that our own religious roots are inseparable from the history, wisdom and insights of the Jewish people, and we seek constantly to address our own insensitivity with regard to the depth and richness of those roots and relationships. We recognize a great diversity of opinion among Jews in both Israel and the United States regarding Israel and Palestine and the broader situation in the Middle East. Our commitment is to listen carefully to the narrative of the Jewish people and the State of Israel whenever we are in dialog. The Jewish partners and organizations with whom we endeavor to work share our commitments to nonviolence and a just peace with security for all involved.

Our responsibility to our Muslim sisters and brothers:

Similarly, our relationship with our Muslim sisters and brothers has been fraught with violence, in too many instances initiated by Christians. In various moments, each of our communities has been both victim and perpetrator. As we work with Muslims regarding Israel and Palestine, we attempt to understand the implications of the Nakba for the Palestinian people, and to appreciate the impact of the unrelenting devastation that event and the ensuing occupation has meant for Muslims in Israel and Palestine and around the world.

Given that so much of the conflict in the world is expressed in religious terms as a conflict between our two peoples, we are committed to stand against violence and build positive relationships with Muslims whenever possible. As we relate to Muslims who approach the challenges of Israel and Palestine from a wide variety of perspectives, we seek partners equally committed to nonviolence with whom to work together for a just peace.

Our responsibility to our Christian sisters and brothers in the Middle East:

We are painfully aware of the growing insecurity and desperation of our Christian sisters and brothers in Palestine and Israel and throughout the Middle East. In too many places, Christians have been forced to flee their own homes in order to save themselves and their families. When Church leaders from this region of the world speak, we listen with the greatest attention, and we feel a special responsibility to lift up and respond to the voices of this ever-shrinking minority of those with whom we feel the closest possible bond. Their common faithfulness to Jesus over the centuries, shared among numerous Christian traditions, is an inspiration to us. Our solidarity with them encompasses their own inter-faith efforts for shalom/salaam.

Our commitment to those committed to nonviolence and justice:

In all instances, we seek to partner and make common cause with those who live the values of nonviolence and justice that we read as God's most fundamental message woven throughout our scripture. While people of the Abrahamic tradition have never fully turned from the sin of perpetrating violence on others, we believe that it is God's deepest desire that we do so. We of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship are always drawn to those who share our commitment to nonviolence as we work for right relationships in the Middle East and around the world.

Our commitment to stand with the oppressed:

Our reading of scripture compels us to stand with those who are oppressed, beaten down and pushed to the margins of society. We listen carefully to them and seek to be their partners and advocates in their struggle to "loose the bonds of injustice and let the oppressed go free."

On the moral impossibility of objectivity and the moral bankruptcy of inaction:

We believe that there is no such thing as an objective party in a conversation layered with as many dynamics of power, privilege, and politics as this one. In our experience, those who claim such objectivity are either naïve or disingenuous. Like others who care passionately about peace and security in Israel and Palestine, we also have a point of view, and we admit that we too are sometimes compromised in our attempt to understand this conflict and to respond appropriately.

However, we also know that choosing non-participation offers no claim to the moral high ground. In fact, we believe that inaction in the face of injustice is the worst kind of taking sides. If we err, we are committed to erring on the side of action rather than inaction.

On the need for humility:

We try to approach both those with whom we agree and those with whom we disagree with the greatest humility. This does not decrease our passion or our commitment to work actively for peace with justice and genuine security for both Israelis and Palestinians. We actively seek partners who demonstrate similar humility, and who are willing to admit their own prejudices and preconceptions.

How we will do our work:

Having stated our foundational commitments and prejudices, we share the following specifics about our beliefs and actions in support of peace, with justice and security, in Israel and Palestine.

1. **Delegations to Palestine and Israel:** We encourage delegations to Israel and Palestine in order to hear the stories of Christians, Muslims and Jews, to better understand the situation there, and to equip ourselves for solidarity and advocacy. Insofar as possible, we will support delegations that visit Christian, Muslim and Israeli Settler communities in the Palestinian Territories, as well as Jewish, Palestinian Christian and Palestinian Muslim, and secular communities in Israel.
2. **Kairos:** We affirm and support the Kairos Document titled “A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering,” created by Christian leaders in the Middle East in December, 2009.
3. **A Political Solution:** Along with the Presbyterian Church (USA), we support a two-state solution that would allow two peoples with three faiths to fairly share this land that is so important to each. Though such a possibility seems increasingly distant, we believe that God is still at work, and that miracles can happen.

Even as we continue to pray and work for a just, two-state solution in which both Israel and Palestine can experience autonomy, security, self-determination, and peace, we note that the possibility of a two-state solution is diminished with each new Israeli settlement, road, political imprisonment, travel restriction and military checkpoint experienced by the Palestinian people. The suffering of the Palestinian people living under these conditions cannot be overstated. Simply put, the occupation must end.

We recognize the impossibility of governing under the constraints imposed on Palestinian leadership by the Israeli occupation. However, even with those limitations, we do not support any violent actions within the Palestinian community, or directed toward Israel in response to the harsh conditions of the occupation. Such actions, and the fear and insecurity they create in Israeli communities, cannot lead to peace. Rather, we affirm all nonviolent efforts for a just peace by both Palestinians and Israelis, and we believe that such efforts help to keep alive the vision of two peoples sharing the land.

4. **On Sensitive Language:** Though we understand the strong feelings elicited by the word “apartheid,” and have sought to avoid such language, we find it increasingly difficult to describe the reality for millions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza without using that word.

Though we understand the strong feelings elicited by the word “terrorism,” and have sought to avoid such language, we believe that this is an appropriate word to describe any action in which the intended or foreseeable victim is a civilian – Israeli or Palestinian. We pray that both “state” and “non-state” terrorism will cease and that all parties, including the U.S., will be empowered to foster nonviolent paths of justice and peace.

5. **Boycott and Divestment:** We support the PC(USA)’s process of engaging corporations in which we hold stock in dialogue about the impact of our investments on prospects for a just peace in Israel and Palestine. When there is no satisfactory response to the church’s concerns about corporations actively benefiting from or supporting the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, we support both boycott and divestment of those companies. These are appropriate tools of nonviolence in the pursuit of justice and peace. Selling our stock in such companies is both an ethical and faithful response by the church. Similarly, refusing to purchase products from companies whose values we do not support is an appropriate response to the ethical dilemma we face as consumers.