

Dear General Assembly Commissioner:

We hope that you found our first mailing (“Just Peace”) to be helpful as you prepare for the 218th General Assembly discussions concerning the Middle East. In this letter we are giving you specific information about the overtures concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, our thoughts related to that, as well as overtures that are relevant to issues of faith, peace and justice in the broader region. Our perspective is the result of prayer, study and research covering hundreds of resources as well as our personal experience in the Middle East, where we have heard 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, many miles of which encroach upon Palestinian lands, and hundreds of check points and road blocks. 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 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 of 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.

The overtures we endorse below speak, in different ways, to the injustice of Israel's occupation and the need for it to end as a necessary first step in establishing a culture of peace and justice in Israel and Palestine.

In the past, General Assembly committees have sometimes taken a number of different overtures addressing similar issues and combined them into a single compromise overture to be brought to the plenary floor. Although this can save time, we offer you the observation that this tactic affects the integrity of the decision-making process. We urge all commissioners to read the following overtures carefully in order to come to an understanding about when combining overtures is appropriate and when it is inappropriate.

The following is a review of the overtures that will come before you this summer, with our recommendations:

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. **We urge your support.**

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. **We urge your support.**

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. **We urge your support.**

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. **We urge your support.**

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. **We urge your support.**

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. **WE URGE YOUR NON-SUPPORT.**

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. **We urge your support.**

Overture 11-08 *On Withdrawal of U.S. Troops from Iraq (Greater Atlanta Presbytery)*. In the context of Overtures 11-09 and 11-10, **we urge your support.**

Overture 11-09 *Regarding Assistance for Iraqi Refugees (Lake Huron Presbytery)*. The existence of Iraqi refugees who are in need of safety, shelter and basic necessities is a reality that impacts the peace and security of Iraq's neighbors, including Israel and Palestine. **We urge your support.**

Overture 11-10 *On Building Peace in Iraq (Baltimore Presbytery)*. Building peace in Iraq has a direct impact on matters of peace and justice in the entire Middle East, including Israel/Palestine. **We urge your support.**

Overture 11-16 *On Peacemaking and the Pursuit of the Justice and Fairness of Shalom (Twin Cities Area Presbytery)*. This overture calls for the support of international law and for the promotion of civil liberties and human rights. It also calls for just peacemaking. **We urge your support.**

Overture 11-17 *On War, Mercenaries and Profiteering (Scioto Valley Presbytery)*. This overture opposes profiteering by American contractors in regard to war and military activities abroad and calls upon the U.S. government to investigate such involvement. Activities by U.S. corporations doing business with Israel in support of its military occupation of Palestinian lands most certainly warrant such investigation and review. **We urge your support.**

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 urge your support.**

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 in the same way 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 previous overtures we endorse in this letter 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 (07-01, 11-01, 11-02, 11-03, 11-04, 11-07, 11-08, 11-09, 11-10, 11-16, 11-17, &

11-23) 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 the concerns of these two overtures moot. Therefore, **WE URGE YOUR NON-SUPPORT OF BOTH OVERTURES, #11-25 & #11-26.**

Overture 11-27 On the Report from MRTI of Corporate Engagements in Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank (General Assembly Council). We support all measures that continue to examine the practices of U.S. corporations that support Israel's military occupation of Palestine. In addition, we have full confidence in the responsible manner in which the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee of the PC(USA) continues to engage such corporations in dialogue. At the same time, we continue to support Overture 11-23 as necessary in light of the fact that the activities of Caterpillar Inc. and Motorola Inc. have been of major concern for years. This overture does not conflict with 11-23 and **we urge your support.**

Overture 11-28 On Preparing a Study on Israel/Palestine within the Context of the Middle East (General Assembly Council). This overture supports the spirit and intent of the Greater Atlanta Presbytery in Overture 11-01. **We urge your support.**

It is in the spirit of hope for a culture of peace and justice in Israel/Palestine that we have shared our heart-felt concerns with you. As a mission network that strives to be true to the great historical principles of the Presbyterian Church (USA), we faithfully work towards that time when both Israelis and Palestinians can tend to olive and vineyard together in lasting peace.

Please pray for the work of this mission network, and all mission networks of our Church, even as we continually lift you up in prayer as you prepare for this most important gathering in June.

Shalom and Salaam,

The Steering Committee
Israel/Palestine Mission Network
Presbyterian Church (USA)