



WIAMEP

Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace
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March 28, 2008

Dear UMC Delegate,

The Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace (WIAMEP) has been mobilizing individuals and groups in the Washington, DC, area about the need for a just peace in Palestine/Israel and promoting steps to end the 40-year Israeli occupation and violence in the region.

We wish to express our support for the United Methodist Church's long-standing position in support of a just peace in the Middle East through ending the illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories (East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza).

WIAMEP supports the proposed Divestment Resolution that will be voted on by the UMC General Conference in Ft. Worth this April 2008. We view its goal to divest from companies that profit from the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem as a necessary step to ending the occupation and securing a just peace. Such a resolution lends a much-needed boost to Palestinians and progressive Israelis who choose non-violent means of resistance and direct action. We hold this position out of concern for the well being of both Israelis and Palestinians, as we understand that the occupation is itself a violent system that in turn produces violent societies, domestic violence, and a general de-valuing of human life. It is important to underscore that the proposed resolution is not a boycott directed against Israel as a nation, but rather it is against Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories captured in June 1967, which constitutes an illegal occupation that stands in contradiction to United Nations resolutions and world opinion.

Israel has consistently violated the 4th Geneva Convention that it signed on December 8, 1949, and multiple UN Security Council Resolutions by, for example, building civilian (Jewish only) settlements in the Palestinian occupied territories, demolishing Palestinian homes, confiscating Palestinian land and constructing a barrier/wall inside the West Bank that separates Palestinians from their work, their schools, their farmlands and medical facilities. At the same time, the U.S. government has repeatedly "protected" Israel from being held accountable to international law, as well as providing Israel with over \$100 billion in foreign aid (mostly military) and \$18 billion in loan guarantees that have enabled Israel to sustain the occupation and continue to oppress Palestinian civilians.

We hold that Israel, with its occupation of the Palestinian territories, is primarily responsible for the continuation of this conflict because it is the occupying authority and has overwhelming military, economic and political power compared to the Palestinian Authority. Israel has continued to expand illegal settlements in the occupied territories and to conduct collective punishment and punitive operations against Palestinians by destroying their homes and crops,

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imposing economic sanctions in addition to imprisoning 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza. These activities do not enhance Israeli security but constitute a breach of Jewish, Muslim and Christian teachings.

The United Methodist Church, like other mainline Protestant churches, has in faithful witness been passing Middle East peace resolutions for decades. Your resolution in 2004 passed overwhelmingly and was one of the most comprehensive resolutions on this issue ever enacted by a major Christian denomination. The proposed Divestment Resolution will draw attention to this issue and the counter-productive role of our own government, providing the hope that US foreign policy may change. The conditions in both the West Bank and Gaza have deteriorated enormously since the Annapolis Conference, facts carefully documented by both Israeli and Palestinian human rights groups.

While visiting the U.S. recently, Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, a strong supporter of a two state solution and the post-Annapolis peace process, publicly criticized on several occasions the lack of any progress by Israel “on the ground.” After Annapolis, Israel announced plans for the construction of over 1,000 new housing units in occupied East Jerusalem. Also the World Bank, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations described substantially increased military check points inside the West Bank as imposition of harsh economic and humanitarian conditions on the Palestinians.

In summary, we believe that

1. Christians should engage in socially responsible investment to ensure that we do not support the occupation and its infrastructure.
2. There is no military solution to this conflict. We believe that peace and justice will be reached only through non-violent resistance and negotiations.

As the second largest Protestant denomination in this country, with the largest church pension fund in North America, we believe that your courageous public stand is in the prophetic tradition and the world needs this moral voice at this time in history when our own government and other international leaders are complicit in not employing non-militaristic means to end injustice and secure a viable peace for all.

Therefore we are greatly encouraged by the UMC Divestment Resolution and commend this timely and courageous action. It will surely bring hope to Palestinians and Israelis in the forefront of the struggle for peace and justice.

Sincerely,

Dr. John Salzberg and Nathan Rich, Co-Chairs
WIAMEP
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