

Middle East Study Committee Recommendations - Final

In service to its ever-linked concerns for peace and justice in Palestine and Israel, and its concern for the enduring integrity and witness of the Christian Church there and in the United States, the Middle East Study Committee recommends that the 219th General Assembly (2010) approve the following recommendations:

1. *Affirmation of Human Rights & Moral Principles*

In accordance with past policy statements and the theological-ethical bases of our confessions, the 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the following human rights, moral principles, and goals guiding its recommendations:

- a. The human right to self-determination through free elections and the rule of law, including the right to enjoy such basic freedoms as those of speech, press, and assembly.
- b. The human right to religious freedom, including full access to religious sites and freedom from all discriminatory practices based on religious identity.
- c. Those additional rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights conventions, including the principle of universal jurisdiction.
- d. The moral principle of applying humanitarian laws regarding warfare to all nations. These laws protect civilians and nonmilitary facilities prohibit such internationally recognized violations as the use of anti-personnel weapons and weapons of mass destruction, the assassination of political opponents, collective punishment, detention without due process, and the torture or abuse of prisoners.
- e. The moral principle of applying these same humanitarian laws regarding warfare to nongovernmental combatants as well. These laws prohibit such practices as suicide bombing, kidnapping, shelling civilian populations, and torturing or abusing prisoners.
- f. The moral principle of granting to Red Cross, Star, or Crescent inspection teams access to all prison facilities.
- g. The moral principle that all refugees have an individual right to return or to adjudicate or negotiate compensation for the loss of home and homeland, wherever those may be.
- h. The moral goal for nations to create a nuclear-free world and, toward that goal, to sign and comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and other relevant treaties.
- i. The moral goal of demilitarizing conflict situations to levels consistent with a state's or people's right to self-defense.
- j. The moral principle of respecting United Nations observers and peacekeeping forces and imposing disciplinary sanctions when nations or entities target UN facilities and personnel.
- k. The moral principle of nonintervention in, noninterference with, and non-destabilization of other countries.

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2. Affirmation of Previous General Assembly Policies & Statements

Given the daunting and mounting obstacles to the viability of a “two-state solution,” and following from the above principles, the 219th General Assembly (2010) affirms with greater urgency our historic Presbyterian stances with specific regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, calling for

- a. an immediate cessation of all violence, whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians;
- b. reaffirmation of Israel’s right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders in accordance with United Nations resolutions.
- c. the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and diversion of water resources;
- d. an immediate freeze both on the establishment or expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and on the Israeli acquisition of Palestinian land and buildings in East Jerusalem;
- e. the relocation by Israel of the Separation Barrier to the 1967 border;
- f. the withholding of U.S. government aid to the state of Israel as long as Israel persists in creating new West Bank settlements;
- g. continuing corporate engagement through the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment with companies profiting from the sale and use of their products for non-peaceful purposes and/or the violation of human rights;
- h. a shared status for Jerusalem;
- i. equal rights for Palestinian citizens of the state of Israel;
- j. the cessation of systematic violation of human rights by any party, specifically, practices of administrative detention, collective punishment, the torture of prisoners and suspects, home demolitions and evictions, and the deportation of dissidents;
- k. the immediate resumption by Israel and Palestine of negotiations toward a two-state solution.

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3. *For the Witness of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

The 219th General Assembly (2010):

- a. Directs the General Assembly Mission Council to set 2010–2012 as a time of Presbyterian prayer and action for the Middle East, including: travel opportunities with a particular emphasis on visits with the Christian communities, study of Reformed theological understandings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of historical understandings that encompass various narratives and verifiable sources, itineration throughout the U.S. by Middle Eastern Christian partners, local dialogues and shared projects with American Jews and Muslims, participation in the ecumenical accompaniment program (EAPPI) in Palestine and Israel of the World Council of Churches, and robust publicity and promotion of these activities.
- b. Authorizes the creation of a Monitoring Group on the Middle East for the next two years that will consist of seven people appointed by the current and immediately past Moderators in consultation with the GAMC staff persons responsible for global mission in the Middle East and for Interreligious Affairs to assist the appropriate General Assembly Mission Council offices and the Middle East staff team in monitoring progress and guiding actions to ensure adequate implementation of policy directions approved by this General Assembly, given the growing complexity and interrelatedness of issues in the region. (It is the understanding that the group would be convened, as necessary and helpful, via teleconferencing or other means incurring minimal expense.) This committee shall be appointed by the end of August 2010. The monitoring group shall include at least one but no more than two members of the existing Middle East Study Committee (MESOC). New appointees shall be chosen on the basis of demonstrated experience with and knowledge of the complex dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within the larger concerns of the Middle East, and shall together comprise an authentic balance representing the fullness of the spectrum of commitments within the PC(USA) toward the people and issues in the region.”
- c. Strongly denounces Caterpillar’s continued profit-making from non-peaceful uses of its products and presses Caterpillar to review carefully its involvement in obstacles to a just and lasting peace in Israel-Palestine and to take affirmative steps to end its complicity in the violation of human rights.
- d. Calls on denominational agencies and entities, presbyteries, congregations, and individual members to invest positively, after due vetting, in sustainable economic development projects for the West Bank and Gaza (that do not support the occupation) sponsored by Palestinians or jointly by Palestinians and Israelis in equitable partnership

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- e. Urges a visit to Israel/Palestine by a high-level joint delegation of Presbyterians (including representatives from the Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Foundation, and the General Assembly Mission Council) and appropriate counterparts in the American ecumenical, Jewish, and Muslim communities, with costs shared among the participating faith groups, for the purpose of identifying opportunities for positive investment, with a report back to the 220th General Assembly (2012).
- f. Commends for study the Kairos Palestine document ('A Moment of Truth'), and endorses the document's emphases on hope for liberation, nonviolence, love of enemy, and reconciliation. We lift up for study the often neglected voice of Palestinian Christians. We direct the monitoring group for the Middle East to create a study guide for the document.
- g. Promotes contributions to Extra Commitment Opportunities for the support of Christian educational institutions throughout the region, especially in Lebanon and Iraq.
- h. Encourages Presbyterians to travel to the region, especially Israel/Palestine, and when doing so to worship and visit with Palestinian Christians, support Christian businesses, engage Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, and Palestinian Muslims, and spend dedicated time in Israel and Palestine."

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4. *Urgent Actions Toward Justice and Peace in Israel, the Occupied Territories of Palestine, and Jerusalem*

The 219th General Assembly (2010):

- a. Advocates the immediate resumption of good faith negotiations to address comprehensively the issues of occupation, refugees, borders, shared status of Jerusalem, release of prisoners and detainees, and security, based on UN Security Council resolutions.
- b. Calls on the U.S. government to exercise strategically its international influence, including making U.S. aid to Israel contingent upon Israel's compliance with international law and peacemaking efforts.
- c. Calls upon Israel to release, without any further delay, withheld Palestinian tax moneys to the Palestinian National Authority.
- d. Calls on the Israeli and Egyptian governments to limit their blockade of Gaza solely to military equipment/devices and to guarantee adequate levels of food, medicine, building supplies, and other humanitarian items, and to allow free commercial exchange in and out of Gaza, and calls on the U.S. government to end any support for the blockade that interferes with the adequacy of such items or such exchange.
- e. Urges the main Palestinian political parties (Fatah and Hamas) to set aside their differences, to pursue an ideology of nonviolence, to reconcile immediately, and to work for peace with each other and with their neighbor, Israel, for the sake of their people, and also calls on the U.S. government to offer support for such reconciliation.
- f. Supports the establishment of an international council for Jerusalem to ensure the nondiscriminatory treatment of all Jerusalemites, including fair allocation of housing and family unification permits, free movement of religious workers of all faiths, fair provision of city services in exchange for taxes, protection of all religious and historic sites, international scientific review of all archeological sites and labeling of historic sites, and equitably accessible mass transit from both Israeli and Palestinian areas and links to the West Bank and Gaza.
- g. Encourages the participation of Palestinian and Israeli religious leaders (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Druze) to participate in the peace process and to lead efforts at reconciliation among both peoples, without governmental interference.
- h. Calls for Bethlehem to be a free and open city accessible to all people.

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5. *Urgent Actions for a Comprehensive Peace with Justice in the Middle East*

The 219th General Assembly (2010) does the following:

- a. Calls on all parties in the Middle East, including Iran and Israel, to refrain from nuclear arms proliferation and to work actively and constructively toward a nuclear-free world especially in the Middle East, and calls on the U.S. to offer support for such a process.
- b. Calls on all parties in the Middle East to cease rhetoric and actions that demonize others, whether that takes the form of anti-Semitism or Islamophobia, as well as rhetoric and actions that threaten the well-being of another nation or people. This includes threats by Iranians and members of Hamas and Hezbollah against Israel, sponsorship by Iran of Holocaust-denial conferences, Israeli efforts to deny the Nakba and threats of a mass transfer (expulsion) of the Palestinians into Jordan or elsewhere, and the perpetuation of maps and textbooks that deny the existence of internationally recognized borders, states, and occupied territories.
- c. Commends as a model to all nations in the region the joint efforts of Bethlehem, Syracuse, and Tel Aviv universities to examine current Israeli and Palestinian government textbooks for existing biases and inaccuracies and encourages the application of the same examination to textbooks used in private religious schools, be they Christian, Jewish, or Muslim.
- d. Condemns, as a matter of principle, the interference of one government in the internal politics of another country, such as Iranian support for Hamas and Hezbollah, American complicity in the Israeli occupation, Syrian interference in the Lebanese political process.
- e. Calls on the Lebanese government to address immediately the plight of Palestinian refugees living within its borders, providing them with access to work and the democratic process.
- f. Calls on the Syrian and Israeli governments to resume negotiations toward a resolution of the Golan Heights occupation and security issues and calls upon the governments of the U.S. and Turkey to support these negotiations.
- g. Commends the bravery and courage of Iranians who have taken to the streets peacefully to demand their democratic rights and calls on the Iranian government to cease its repression of democratic and religious freedoms.
- h. Calls on the U.S. government to exercise strategically its international influence and the withholding of financial, economic, and military aid to countries other than Israel, as we

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might with Israel, until such a time as the civil, religious, and other freedoms of their peoples are fully exercised; and to end U.S. taxpayer support for regimes that perpetuate inequality and popular frustration.

- i. Supports an accelerated shift of Iraq occupation activities to effective reconstruction, and the allocation of significant ongoing monetary reparations to help resettle refugees and those internally displaced, compensate victims and survivors of violence, and restore economic sovereignty and productivity to its oil industry.

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6. *Addressing Our Own Government*

For U.S. government policy to fulfill its “honest broker” aspirations and honor a region-wide human rights agenda, the 219th General Assembly (2010):

- a. Calls on the U.S. government to repent of its sinful behavior vis-a-vis the Middle East, including its ongoing war in Iraq, its selectively undermining or supporting the democratic process in such places as Iran and the Palestinian National Authority, its continuing support of nondemocratic regimes for the sake of oil or leverage over oil, or its involvement with security services and contractors who engage in torture, surveillance, and other human rights violations.
- b. Calls on the U.S. government to eliminate existing loopholes in tax codes that permit its citizens to make donations to organizations that support human rights violations and breaches of international law and UN Security Council resolutions—particularly those loopholes that allow tax-deductible donations that financially support the Israeli settlement enterprise on occupied territory or Palestinian militant groups.
- c. Calls on the U.S. government to give a thorough accounting to its citizenry as to the amounts of its foreign aid to countries in the Middle East that have been used by the recipient nations to finance human rights violations, breaches of international law and UN Security Council Resolutions; ; and to redirect adequate allocations of aid toward (1) the rebuilding of Gaza and humanitarian assistance for its people, and (2) Palestinian reuse or dismantling of the remaining settlement infrastructure following the establishment of a Palestinian state.
- d. Calls on the U.S. government to work with other governments to provide reconstruction aid with assurances that there would be no further destruction of infrastructure provided by this aid.
- e. Call on the U.S. government to pursue the goal of guaranteeing continued security for Israel from an atmosphere of fear of rocket attacks or other forms of violence, while the U.S. also addresses the Palestinian needs for security and a just resolution of the conflict with Israel.

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7. *Concerning Christian Presence in the Middle East*

For tolerance of religious pluralism, freedom of worship, and protection of Christian communities and in line with principles stated above, the 219th General Assembly (2010):

- a. Views with respect the integrity of the religious faiths of Jews, Muslims, and other peoples, the value of noncoercion in religious life, and the benefits of public toleration of religious diversity to diminish extremism, discrimination, and bigotry.
- b. Recognizes the current role Christian communities play in helping preserve cultural diversity, historical awareness, and political freedom.
- c. Expresses its alarm at increasing waves of Christian emigration thus diminishing Christian presence and witness in the Middle East, and cites as positive counter-examples the inclusion and fuller participation of Christians in Syrian and Jordanian societies.
- d. Calls on the government of Iraq to strengthen the protection of minority communities, especially Christian communities under threat, within contexts of increasing protection for all citizens.
- e. Recognizes the efforts made by the Egyptian government and civil society to ease the growing climate of tension between the country's Christians and Muslims, and urges that the root causes of fear, anger, and the growing incidence of violent outbreaks be addressed, in order to restore mutual trust and to enable all citizens to enjoy their full and equal rights.
- f. Urges the government of Israel to honor family reunification of Christians and others, to provide permits for home construction and improvement without discrimination for all its citizens and those Christians and Muslims under its occupation, to apply the 1967 Protection of Holy Sites law equitably, and to extend religious freedoms described in Recommendation IV.f. throughout Israel without discrimination and prejudice against non-Jews.

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8. *Engaging This Report*

The 219th General Assembly (2010):

- a. Receives Part One of this report (Introduction; Letters to Our Church, Partners, and Engaged Parties; Biblical Theological Reflections; ‘What We Have Seen and Heard’) as rationale for recommendations only, not as policy.
- b. Delete Part Three, Items I and II (I. Notes from a Humanistic, Liberal Zionist: A Personal Narrative; II. A Plea for Justice: A Historical Analysis), and replace with a series of eight narratives of comparable length, four arising from the range of authentically Palestinian perspectives (including both Christian and Muslim), and four arising from the range of authentically Israeli perspectives, along with an annotated bibliography for additional understanding about the breadth and depth of both authentically Palestinian and Israeli spectrum of perspectives but above all authentically pro-justice and pro-peace. These narratives and the bibliography will be collected and approved by the Monitoring Group on the Middle East.”