

Breaking Down the Walls

as approved by the

219TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2010)
of the
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

Contents

Part One: We Bear Witness	1
A. Introduction.....	1
B. Letters to Our Church, Partners, and Engaged Parties.....	3
C. Witness of the Scriptures: A Biblical Theological Reflection.....	11
D. Our Witness: “What We Have Seen and Heard”	23
Part Two: Recommendations	38
Part Three: Study Materials	45
[As cited in recommendation 8.b. above, this section will be collected and approved by the Monitoring Group as part of their responsibility.]	
Appendixes	45
1. List of Contacts Made by Middle East Study Committee	45
2. General Assembly Policy Review	48
3. Presbyterian Panel Survey Results.....	57
4. The Amman Call.....	68
5. Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth.....	71

Breaking Down the Walls

PART ONE: WE BEAR WITNESS

A. Introduction

Increasingly, we find that we are living in a world with numerous walls and barriers. These are walls that force us to live in sometimes small and isolated compartments. These walls and the resulting compartments often prevent us from seeing and understanding the lives of others who live in different compartments or on the other side of the wall from us. These walls are leading many to live in fear, isolation, and poverty; therefore, preventing all parties from living in peace.

This is no more obvious than with the conflict in Israel and Palestine. Ideological, theological, political, economic, and even physical walls have been erected that are preventing the establishment of a just peace in the Middle East.

Our Presbyterian confessions clearly affirm God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the church's mission of reconciliation as being the heart of the gospel. Since Christ "... has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us,"¹ we are entrusted as "ambassadors of Christ" with this "message of reconciliation."² We are called to be those who work to break down these walls that stand in the way of the realization of God's peaceful and just kingdom.

The Middle East Study Committee of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which was mandated by our 218th General Assembly (2008) and appointed by our current and two previous Moderators, has taken seriously this gospel mandate of seeking to break through these walls of hostility and to envision appropriate steps that we recommend which our church, our nation, and the other parties involved in this conflict take.

Our voice is one, which is priestly, prophetic, and pastoral. The first voice that will be heard in this report is a priestly voice speaking of our theological understanding of justice, Zion, the land, and reconciliation. The next voice is both prophetic and pastoral. Prophets and pastors are called first and foremost to truth telling. From the vast experiences and study of the members of this committee, from numerous meetings with people and leaders of diverse communities throughout the Middle East (including Iraqi and Iranian church leaders), from meetings with political and religious leaders in Washington and New York with a wide spectrum of perspectives, from debating and challenging one another, and from traveling together for two weeks in the Middle East³, we strive in this report to tell the truth as we see it and understand it. Based on this, we are compelled to speak pastorally to ourselves as a denomination and our partners in the region, and prophetically to other powers engaged in this ongoing conflict.

Our voice is one that has a definite sense of urgency. The time for action from all parties is now. We are witnessing a rapidly closing window of opportunity for action. Events are happening every day now in Israel and Palestine and the Middle East that are making it increasingly difficult to bring about this just peace for which we all pray. If we do not act now, our fear is that we will all look back with deep regret and shameful guilt. Our spirit, though, is not one of fear, but rather of hope. We do believe that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) will once again speak with a clear, priestly, prophetic, and pastoral voice.

Our prayer is that the 219th General Assembly (2010) and our Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will seriously and prayerfully discuss and approve the contents of this report, embrace the recommended actions, and recommit our church to being an agent of reconciliation—to being a church that will

wholeheartedly work to break down the ideological, theological, economic, and political walls that stand in the way of a just peace. It is also our prayer that the whole church will then engage in a thoughtful and prayerful study of this report with a view to taking significant actions toward fulfilling God's vision of peace for all peoples.

B. Letters to Our Church, Partners, and Engaged Parties

Each of the following eight letters is addressed to one of the various parties with whom we are engaged in this discussion of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The letters are written primarily with a pastoral voice in the hope that each of these parties will continue to be fully engaged with us in our common struggle for a just peace.

Letter to Our Presbyterian Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We come to this work hoping that we have brought Reformed theology, historical Presbyterian positions, and the present realities together in a way that gives honor and glory to Christ. This work is for his sake, and is intended to strengthen the conversation within the family. And we have been grateful to so many of you who have prayed for us and our ministry in this endeavor.

The Moderators of the 216th, 217th, and 218th General Assemblies (2004, 2006, and 2008) appointed us to “prepare a comprehensive study, with recommendations, that is focused on Israel/Palestine within the complex context of the Middle East” (*Minutes*, 2008, Part I, p. 1226) and to report back to the 219th General Assembly (2010).

There is much in our work that commends you to engagement with the issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within the context of the broader Middle East. Above all, we want you to share our alarm at the continuing decline of the Christian community in the region. Through our work as a committee, we have had the gift of visiting with our partner churches and organizations. And we have grown in our appreciation for what the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has done through the centuries to encourage, nurture, and strengthen these ancient communities who are our spiritual forebears. The time is critical, however, to continue that strong tradition for the sake of the gospel in the region of its birth.

There is much more in our report, however. And this work has been done with careful research, deliberation, and prayer. We hope that it will invite you in, that it may be an entry for your own study of the Middle East. And in our recommendations, we have offered tools that we think will assist us all in this endeavor. To the best of our ability, we have striven to bring a balance between the pastoral, priestly, and prophetic roles of our church’s calling.

We are also aware that our recommendations have a much wider audience beyond the membership of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who will be scrutinizing our work and ready to interpret it for their own means. Because of this, we have written other introductory letters that have a focus toward those constituencies. We are aware that such constituencies are far more diverse than any one letter could summarize. Even so, we hope that you will assist us by sharing these letters with those in your community to whom they are addressed. Our primary concern is that, no matter what the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) might say about the situation in the Middle East, we remain committed to a common cause toward justice and security for both sides, and breaking down dividing walls, even when we do not see eye-to-eye on matters of policy and practice.

May we continue to work together for the sake of all of God’s children.

Letter to Our American Brothers and Sisters in the Ecumenical Community,

For many years, we have partnered with you through the National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches in matters of common concern in the Middle East. It is our hope that we can continue to do so. We are aware that our polities and structures are different. And while we do not always agree on details, we know that we share a common passion for the region and for the justice with peace.

Our practice has been to focus on those things that unite us; this not only makes sense practically, but also theologically. Now, with a regional situation that is so critical, and with a rapidly disintegrating hope for a two-state solution in Israel/Palestine, we think the time has come for us to study more closely those places where we might have different approaches so that we might challenge and encourage one another and grow in our unity for the sake of Christ our Lord. We also know, within your own polities, you continue to study the issues and make recommendations as well. There are subtle differences between our conclusions. And unfortunately, where we have disagreed on matters of practice and policy, this has become an opportunity for those who do not share our concern for all parties in the region to divide us and even to manipulate one denomination's policy to criticize another denomination's approach. Let us be of one voice.

In addition to what we in the United States have to say, there are the voices of our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Middle East. In our regional travels, we have been encouraged by their steadfastness, distressed by their challenges, and moved by their diversity, but also their unity. As their ecumenical voices have spoken, from the Amman Call to the Kairos Palestine document, the Middle Eastern Church has spoken clearly and directly to us. We ignore their voice at our own peril. Let us do all we can to show our oneness with them in Christ.

We know that you have been and continue to be engaged in the Middle East. Our hope is that our work will both encourage and challenge you and your members to deepen that engagement.

Letter to Our American Jewish Friends,

For decades we have worked side-by-side in innumerable causes in our own nation for the sake of justice and human well-being. And yet, with the introduction of the corporate engagement process in 2004 (and the use of the word “divestment”), this relationship has been seriously tested.

We want to be sure to say to you in no uncertain terms: we support the existence of Israel as a sovereign nation within secure and recognized borders. No “but,” no “let’s get this out of the way so we can say what we really want to say.” We support Israel’s existence as granted by the U.N. General Assembly. We support Israel’s existence as a home for the Jewish people. We have said this before, and we say this again. We say it because we believe it; we say it because we want it to continue to be true.

And, at the same time, we are distressed by the continued policies that surround, sustain, and consolidate the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights, in particular. Many of us come to this work out of a love for Israel. And it is because of this love that we continue to say the things we say about the occupation, the settlement infrastructure, and the absolute death knell it is sounding for the hopes of a two-state solution, a solution that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has supported for more than sixty years.

We also want to make it clear that what we say in moral criticism of policies and actions of the Israeli government should not be used as a battering ram against Israel’s right to membership in the community of nations nor to deepen anti-Semitism or any categorical blame of the Jewish people for the ills of the world. As those whose faith originated in the synagogues of the Fertile Crescent, our love of our common heritage is precious. Anti-Semitism has no place in faithful Christian expression.

Our hope is that we can work together for a more just and secure Israel. We have found this to be possible with local networks more often than with national organizations within the mainstream Jewish community. We are hard-pressed to find statements from such organizations that are willing to oppose the occupation or the settlement policy that has dominated Israel since 1967. Even so, we are hopeful as organizations like J-Street, B’Tselem, Jewish Voice for Peace, and others continue to raise the banner that being pro-Israel and being truly Jewish is not tantamount to complicity in the excesses of Israeli policy. It is our hope that the leadership of mainstream American Jewish organizations will catch up with this growing reality of Jewish identity in the U.S.

We are aware that our report will likely draw such critiques as being “unfair” or “imbalanced.” We believe that our report, however, is quite fair. Our analysis, both through careful research and through our experience of being in the Middle East, is that Israel is the most powerful party to the conflict. Therefore, Israel has both the responsibility and the ability to reverse the course of the current precipitous decline throughout the region.

May we continue to pray, and work, for the peace of Jerusalem, the Middle East, and our world.

Letter to Our American Muslim Friends,

Our relationship in the Western Hemisphere is a more recent one than that of our connection with our Jewish neighbors. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has worked through the years for increased interfaith understanding in Muslim-Christian relations, and will continue to do so. Our sponsorship of the Interfaith Listening Program, bringing Christian and Muslim leaders from around the world to the U.S. to model what our society might look like, is evidence of this.

We are also encouraged by the open letter to the Christian churches, “A Common Word Between Us and You.” Our church responded favorably and continues to encourage our members and congregations to explore common ground with our Muslim neighbors.

We have resisted those who have attempted to stoke the fires of cultural conflict. We are aware that American Muslims have come under more scrutiny, pressure, and, indeed, racism since the tragedies of September 11th. Violence is a phenomenon of the human condition, not the exclusive domain of any religion or people group, as our own Christian history attests. We hope that we can continue to explore ways we can work together to bring attention to these injustices and work together for a future in which all of humanity is granted the dignity it deserves.

We also challenge you, especially those of you in the West, to take seriously your call to be bridge builders: both within the Muslim world (e.g. between Shiite and Sunni) and between the East and West. We know that more, much more, can be done. And while we are deeply aware of our own complicity (both for historic Western colonial influence in the Middle East and for more recent American intervention in the region), we are hopeful that more can be done from within the Muslim world to address the ongoing divides that erode our humanity.

We are grateful for American Muslims who continue to decry violence perpetrated in the name of Islam. We want to partner with you in amplifying your voices. And we would like to hear more, including voices from those in the Middle East where, as in our own country, violence, too often, can be a watchword and where religion, too often, can be used as a battering ram. We look to you, as leaders of the Islamic world, to speak and act strongly on behalf of justice for all, including Christians and your fellow Muslims.

We hope that you hear these words of challenge as from those who seek mutual friendship. May the common words between us and you be love, peace, and justice.

Letter to Our Middle Eastern Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

You are the living stones of the Church. You are the salt of the earth, giving flavor to the whole region, despite your numbers or proportions. We have visited with you. You have challenged us. You have welcomed us. And you have taught us immeasurably.

We cannot fully identify with the struggles of being a minority religious community. As American Christians, we are only recently coming to terms with the possibility that we, too, might have to face this reality. And so we have much more to learn from you and your model of faithfulness. And we cannot imagine the land of Christ devoid of the body of Christ. May our ongoing partnership be one that encourages your steadfast witness, not only on behalf of your own flocks, but on behalf of the worldwide body of Christ.

You cherish your national culture. This is a challenging word to us who can act as though the gospel originated in the West. And yet, as part of a society that has confused our culture with our faith at times, we feel that we have something to offer you. Be careful; be faithful. We often fall into the temptation to be more in line with culture. However, we also know that the gospel calls us to faithful obedience, even when facing risk to our own selves on behalf of Christ's truth. But when the wider society advocates violence, or when it seeks to marginalize one group or another, our encouragement to you is to discern the Spirit's call in the face of such circumstances. We pray that you will be led and strengthened in faithfulness.

To our Palestinian brothers and sisters in faith, we particularly want to commend the words above. We also want to commend you to unity. As Presbyterians, we have come to Israel and Palestine as partners; not seeking to establish our own congregations, but to support you in your continued witness. We pray for your unity. We encourage you not to compete over an increasingly shrinking number of Christians or over a decreasingly smaller influence in regional politics. We beseech you to remain focused on preaching Christ and him crucified, and risen. It is your own experience of his suffering that can teach us all. We will do what we can do amplify the word you preach from the heart of suffering, the Kairos Palestine document, and your resurrection hope.

We also know, our dear Palestinian friends, that your suffering is primarily under the weight of occupation. But we also know that this is not the only cause of suffering. At best, your numbers leave you marginalized by the wider Palestinian society and many ignorant of your practices and faith. At worst, there are elements that seek to eliminate the Christian presence from the region altogether. To you, we commend the example of our Lord, who, even faced with the loss of his own life, preferred to be an agent of healing, restoring the centurion's ear in the Garden of Gethsemane. Do not be afraid to speak out against injustice. But do not let temptation to injustice overtake you.

May your witness continue to encourage us; and may we continue to show our debt to you as our spiritual forebears.

Letter to Our Palestinian Friends,

Our history in the Middle East goes back to the 1820s. For many of us, our personal histories and those of our Presbyterian forebears goes back nearly that far to Israel/Palestine. From 1948, we have made our stance clear on the unjust situation of Palestinian refugees since the Nakba. Your experience is one of displacement; as a people of faith, we are kinsfolk. Our challenge is to accompany you in exile.

For us, this is not only an issue of sympathy in the midst of suffering. We have come to know Palestinians as our brothers and sisters in our congregations in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Their stories and witness have strengthened us. And yet, we confess, there are many in our own number who remain unaware of this.

Year after year our General Assembly has made our position known to the world, that the Palestinian people deserve justice and the right to their homeland. We have advocated for a two-state solution that affirms the right of return for Palestinian refugees, so long deprived of their home and their dignity. And when we included corporate engagement in these statements in 2004, you rejoiced in this act of solidarity. You let us know how pleased you were.

Because of this, we want to be clear to you: we hold in tension the rights and aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis to have safe and secure lives. We know that there is consensus in the international community around this, and we continue to work for this. Our corporate engagement in Israel/Palestine, reaffirmed by General Assemblies since 2004, focuses attention on companies that profit from the violence of the occupation. Our efforts that focus on Israel are those that focus on unjust policies, not on Israel as a nation.

We still see the occupation as the major obstacle to regional stability, and to the just solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We do not see it as the only obstacle. Being oppressed does not justify using the means of the oppressor; nor does suffering from the breach of international law permit similar breaches, even if smaller in scale. We are alarmed by acts of violence committed by militants and extremists.

We are also alarmed when we hear some Palestinians use anti-Semitic language against Jews and Israelis. We know that you are well-versed in the language of human rights; it has meant the building of a strong civil society in the face of incredible odds and overwhelming oppression of occupation. We hope that this zeal for equality would include all.

We have had experiences and know of Palestinian Christians and Muslims living side-by-side in peaceful coexistence. Yet we are also alarmed by the increase of targeted violence against Palestinian Christian institutions, be they from traditional or evangelical communities. For us, the presence of the Christian community is more than nostalgia for the time of Jesus; it is a vital part of the Palestinian fabric of society alongside their Muslim neighbors.

We commit ourselves both to pray and to work for the day that Palestine will be free and independent. May it come soon!

Letter to Our Israeli Friends,

Much of what we have said to our American Jewish friends we say to you. We are strong advocates for Israel's secure existence. The fact that we are deeply troubled by Israeli policies should not diminish this advocacy in any way, shape, or form. We continue to speak out against anti-Semitism, knowing that it is an evil which our forbears in faith inflicted upon you and your ancestors. We are fervent in our hope that Israel would continue to be a homeland for the Jewish people.

We say all this because we believe it. And we stand by it in word and in deed. Our corporate engagement process has been handled carefully so as to focus our attention on companies who profit from practices we do not support. We have also encouraged positive investment in the region, including companies whose policies and practices of coexistence within Israeli society's diverse tapestry and between Israelis and Palestinians are ones we can wholeheartedly support.

We grieve when anyone is a victim of violence, but especially civilians, be they Palestinian or Israeli. The number of casualties may give evidence to the imbalance in the conflict; however, each person is created in the image of God. We know that God's heart must be the first to break. Trauma is trauma, no matter who experiences it. They cannot compete with one another; instead, our hope is that trauma may lead to healing across divides, bound by a common humanity.

Our recent trip to the region, and to Israel and the Occupied Territories in particular, was marked by our own heartbreak. The situation on the ground is changing rapidly. The rise of the extremist settler movement within Israel belies the Israel as a nation for all of its citizens we so long to see. The ongoing land expropriation and settlement expansion, in East Jerusalem in particular, continues to undermine, and indeed, destroy the possibility for a just and secure peace for Israelis and Palestinians alike. The Separation Barrier (part wall, part fence) and its route are evidence of this. Beyond this, we are increasingly troubled by the rhetoric and actions that support and facilitate a growing radicalized settler population. Your government cannot credibly claim that the incumbent violence against and dehumanization of Palestinians are happening without their knowledge; indeed, your government is aiding and abetting these basic violations of human rights.

And just as we have spoken and acted against our own society's vision of itself as a nation when it behaved as though it were "above the law," we will do the same for Israel. We both have a place in the community of nations. Let us act as though we do.

We truly yearn for the day when Israel is secure, and when Israel and Palestine live side-by-side in peace and justice and mutual respect. And we will continue to work for that vision. We hope that we can work together in this endeavor.

Letter to Our American Neighbors, Friends, Fellow Citizens, Government Representatives, and Our American Administration:

We are nine Presbyterians who are also American citizens. And while there are many audiences for our work, our hope is that we will also be able to encourage and challenge you to work with us, and allow us to work with you, to seek justice, security, and peace throughout the Middle East.

No doubt some of our words will come across as harsh rebuke; please hear them as our desire to speak the truth in love. We are grateful for the freedoms our nation provides us, and we see them as nothing short of God's grace for us as a nation and as individuals. It is because of this that we speak as bluntly as we do, following Christ's word to confess the log in our own eye before pointing out the speck in our neighbor's. In short, we think our American ideal of the equal dignity afforded each human being is one for which we commendably strive. And when we as a nation fall short of that ideal, we must be honest with ourselves.

Our nation is powerful. As a result, when we act well, our works of good will, opportunity, and equality spread far. By the same token, when we behave badly, the consequences are devastating. It is our hope that, as a nation, we will confess the latter while we strive for the former in relating to the rest of the world. May this especially be true in the Middle East, where our intervention has been, at best, inconsistent, and at worst, destructive.

We have seen in Israel/Palestine, and in the neighboring nations, how governments who receive extravagant benefits of our foreign aid consistently violate the most basic of human rights. This is a fact that should give every American pause and should move us to hold our elected officials accountable.

And to you, those whom we have elected, whether Republican or Democrat, we are tired of partisan politics. We are weary of pronouncements that do nothing to further the cause of peace and actions that obstruct it in the Middle East. It is our foreign aid and political impotence that enable the continued Israeli Occupation, among other regional injustices. We implore you: Hold nations accountable for what they receive from our taxes. And, at the very least, implement existing American laws that would do much to alleviate unconscionable suffering. Our stated policy has supported a two-state solution for decades; the opportunity for that to happen is disappearing rapidly.

We are ready to work with you to bring peace, security, and justice to Palestinians and Israelis alike. And where we believe you are amiss, we will continue to speak truth to power.

C. Witness of the Scriptures: A Biblical Theological Reflection

In developing policy statements and actions relating to critical world issues, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has always held it essential to study the biblical and theological concepts that establish an ethical foundation for our positions. As our denomination once again addresses the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, four biblical concepts and their interrelationship require specific examination: Justice, Zion, Covenant and Land, and Reconciliation.

The Middle East is the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and followers devoted to all three religions have continued to live there to this day. In the biblical and theological reflection below, care has been taken to include detailed references to “the Older Testament”⁴—first, because these books are held to be authoritative by both Judaism and Christianity;⁵ and second, because it is there in the Bible that one sees most clearly the struggle of a nation’s leaders and people to exercise power with justice. And because the concept of justice is also central to the morality of Islam, references to the Qur’an and the Islamic tradition have been included in the first section immediately below.

Justice

“Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel says: By three things is the world sustained: by justice, by truth, and by peace, as it is said, *Truth and justice and peace judge ye in your gates* (Zech. 8:16).”⁶ This profound interpretation of a verse from the prophet Zechariah, spoken by a rabbi of the second century C.E. living in Roman Palestine, was in turn commented upon with great wisdom some two centuries later by another Palestinian rabbi, Rav Muna. He said, “These three things are actually one. When justice is done, truth is served, and peace is achieved. ... Wherever there is justice there is peace (and wherever there is peace there is justice).”⁷

“Justice” is central to the Older Testament (including Zech. 8:16), the Newer Testament,⁸ and the scripture of Islam, the Qur’an.⁹

First, in both testaments of the Bible justice is presented as an essential attribute of God’s own nature as Sovereign of the universe. “For the Lord is a God of justice” (Isa. 30:18c); “... I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth” (Jer. 9:24b); “Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, ... who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry” (Ps. 146:5–7); “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all injustice” (1 Jn. 1:9); “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter [of straightness (i.e., justice)] is the scepter of your [reign]” (Heb. 1:8b–c); “You are just, O Holy One ...” (Rev. 16:5b); “Just and true are your ways, [Sovereign] of the nations!” (Rev. 15:3c); “[The Mighty One] has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly” (Lk. 1:51–52). And in Islam, one of the ninety-nine “beautiful names” of God is *al-’Adl*, “The Just,” or “Justice” (itself).

Second, based on this identification of justice as central to God’s sovereign role, the Bible also presents justice as essential to the role of human monarchs and of earthly governors in general. “At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for [justice (*mishpat*)]” (Judg. 4:4–5); “So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and equity to all his people” (2 Sam. 8:15); “... For time would fail me to tell of ... David ...—who through faith ... administered justice ... (Heb. 11:32b–33a); “Give the king your justice, O God ... May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice” (Ps. 72:1–2); “... as [Paul] discussed justice, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix [, the Roman governor,] became frightened ...” (Acts 24:25a); “[King] Jehoshaphat ... said to the judges, ‘... Now, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take

care what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the Lord our God, or partiality, or taking of bribes” (2 Chr. 19:4a, 6a, 7). This same extension of the justice of the sovereign God to the role of earthly governments is found in Islam—for example, in this saying of the prophet Muhammad (or, *hadith*): “The Government (*al-Sultan*) is the shadow of God on the earth; all of His servants who are oppressed shall turn to it. When it is just, it shall be rewarded ...”¹⁰

Third, the Bible identifies the practice of justice as essential not only for those who govern but also for all of God’s people. “... I have [known Abraham], that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Gen. 18:19); “Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times” (Ps. 106:3); “... what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8b–d); “... let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream” (Am. 5:24); “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his [justice], and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt. 6:33); “... justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced ...” (Mt. 23:23c–d); “... in every nation anyone who fears [God] and does what is [just] is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:35); “No longer present your members to sin as instruments of [injustice], but ... present your members to God as instruments of [justice]” (Rom. 6:13a, c); “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but [justice] and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17); “Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of [justice]” (Eph. 6:14); “You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (Deut. 16:19a, 20). In like manner, the Qur’an reads: “O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor...” (Sura 4:135).¹¹

Here an all-important question arises: “To whom is due this ‘justice, and only justice’ that, according to Deuteronomy 16:20, must be practiced by all God’s people? Is justice due only to persons of our own ethnicity and/or religion, or is it due as well to others different from ourselves?” How Jesus would answer this question seems altogether clear. For the Gospel of Matthew, drawing upon Isaiah 42:1, describes Jesus in this way: “Here is my servant, whom I[, God,] have chosen, ... and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles” (Mt. 12:18a, d). And within the Jewish tradition, the second-century rabbi already cited above, Simeon ben Gamaliel, is quoted as having said while reflecting on Deuteronomy 16: “Justice must be accorded to non-Jews as to Jews; the former should have the option of seeking judgment before either a Jewish or a pagan court.”¹² And in Islam, Yusuf Ali cites a case in which the prophet Muhammad ruled in favor of a Jew over against a nominal Muslim, “according to the strict principle of justice,” and resisted communal pressure to do the contrary.¹³

Thus, “justice, and only justice, you shall pursue” on behalf of all persons and not just your own people. But what exactly constitutes the “justice” that is due to all? The Bible in general and Jesus in particular answer in this way. Justice is: promoting truth;¹⁴ upholding the cause of the poor, the weak, and the needy;¹⁵ loving those who are “other” and providing for their needs;¹⁶ restoring what has been stolen;¹⁷ humbling the proud;¹⁸ issuing fair and equitable judgments in court;¹⁹ ending oppression;²⁰ keeping God’s statutes and commandments;²¹ following God’s will rather than one’s own;²² fostering peace;²³ and not pursuing dishonest gain, not shedding innocent blood, not practicing violence, not trusting in military might.²⁴ In Islam, according to John L. Esposito, “The Quran envisions a society based on the unity and equality of believers, a society in which moral and social justice will counterbalance oppression of the weak and economic exploitation.... Exploitation of the poor, weak, widows, women, orphans ([Sura] 4:2; 4:12) is vividly condemned... False contracts, bribery, abuse of women, hoarding of wealth to the exclusion of its subordination to higher ends, and usury are denounced.”²⁵

As shall soon be seen, “justice” understood in biblical ways came to underpin ancient Israel’s beliefs about a person’s right to enter the temple precincts of Zion or even to live within the city of Jerusalem.

Zion—and Justice

The name “Zion” evolved and multiplied in its ancient applications. Originally, it designated the fortress of the pre-Israelite city of Jerusalem captured by David around the year 1000 B.C.E.²⁶ “Zion” then came to designate the rather small “City of David” of which the fortress was a part.²⁷ When the Ark of the Covenant was shifted to the new temple built by Solomon, the name “Zion” was transferred from the confines of David’s city to the new sacred space lying to its northwest—the temple precincts,²⁸ the place on earth where God most fully dwelled,²⁹ the “touchpoint” between heaven and earth.³⁰ Next, by metonymy—a figure of speech in which the name of one thing stands for the name of another thing with which it is associated—“Zion” came also to designate the entire city of Jerusalem together with its residents,³¹ and then, with the destruction of that city in 587 B.C.E., it came also to serve as a name for the whole people of Israel.³² Then, too, in the developing eschatology of ancient Israel’s prophets and psalmists after 587, “Zion” named the about-to-be rebuilt (or, for somewhat later prophets and psalmists, the recently rebuilt) city of Jerusalem and temple that served as a focus of hope—hope for the restoration of God’s people after exile,³³ hope for the advent of peace throughout the world,³⁴ and hope for a renewed covenant with God.³⁵

Persons’ right to enter God’s presence within the temple precincts of holy Zion or even to live within the city of Jerusalem was closely linked to their living justly—that is, to their living in accordance with the demands of covenant law. In the eighth century B.C.E., the prophet Isaiah proclaimed that the people of Zion would be spared from judgment only through repentance and the leading of just lives (Isa. 1:27–28). Since justice and righteousness were divine attributes with which God had filled Zion (Isa. 33:5), justice would be the line and righteousness the plummet by which the people of Zion would be measured and weighed (Isa. 28:16–17). Only those in Zion “who despise the gain of oppression, who wave away a bribe instead of accepting it, who stop their ears from hearing of bloodshed and shut their eyes from looking on evil” would be able to abide in the presence of the God of justice (Isa. 33:14–16; cf. 30:18). A contemporary of Isaiah, the prophet Micah, condemned the rulers and leading citizens, “who abhor justice and pervert all equity” and thereby “build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong” (Mic. 3:9–10). Because of their actions, “Zion shall be plowed as a field” (Mic. 3:11–12). Nearly 100 years later, the prophet Jeremiah called upon the refugees from the former northern kingdom of Israel to repent their evil so that God might again bring them to Zion (Jer. 3:14), and he denounced those of Judah who entered the temple to worship the Lord without having amended their ways and ceased their violations of God’s commandments (Jer. 7:1–15). Two psalms also state explicitly that those who enter the temple precincts—which is to say, Zion—should be persons who practice justice.

“ O Lord, who may abide in your tent?
 Who may dwell on your holy hill?
 Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is [just (*tzedeq*)],
 and speak the truth from their heart,
 who do not slander with their tongue,
 and do no evil to their friends,
 nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;
 in whose eyes the wicked are despised,
 but who honor those who fear the Lord;
 who stand by their oath even to their hurt;
 who do not lend money at interest,
 and do not take a bribe against the innocent.
 Those who do these things shall never be moved.”
 Ps. 15:1–3, 5c³⁶

“Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
 And who shall stand in his holy place?
 Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
 who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
 and do not swear deceitfully.
 They will receive blessing from the Lord,
 and [a just reward (*tzdaqah*)] from the God of their salvation.”Ps. 24:3–5³⁷

Thus, the Older Testament closely connects the concepts of “Zion” and “justice,” for Zion is the principal earthly dwelling place of the God of justice.

The Older Testament also speaks of Zion as a place to which not only Jews but also other peoples and nations will come both to worship God and to receive God’s teaching. Toward the end of the sixth century B.C.E., the prophet we call Third Isaiah proclaimed to those who had returned from exile in Babylon to the holy mountain that is Zion, “Maintain justice, and do what is right” (Isa. 56:1a). And he proceeded to tell his fellow Jews that what is just and right includes joining God in welcoming to the holy mountain and its sacred precincts those from other lands who love God and strive to keep the commandments, for God’s temple “shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa. 56:6–8). And according to Psalm 87, “Zion is the mother city of all who know the Lord, wherever they are born”—be that Canaan, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia, or any other place.³⁸ Other passages as well share that vision:

“Let this be recorded for a generation to come, ...
 so that the name of the Lord may be declared in Zion,
 and his praise in Jerusalem,
 when peoples gather together,
 and kingdoms, to worship the Lord.” (Ps. 102:18a, 21–22)

And:

“In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house
 shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
 and shall be raised up above the hills.
 Peoples shall stream to it,
 and many nations shall come and say:
 ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
 to the house of the God of Jacob;
 that he may teach us his ways
 and that we may walk in his paths.’
 For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
 and the word of Lord from Jerusalem.
 He shall judge between many peoples,
 and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
 they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
 and their spears into pruning hooks;
 nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
 neither shall they learn war any more;
 but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
 and no one shall make them afraid;
 for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. (Mic. 4:1–4 [see also Isa. 2:2–4])

Thus, according to the Older Testament, the final effect of the exiles’ return to Zion will be the dawn of an age of peace and a joining with other peoples and nations to worship and study the teachings of the one true God. It is thus noteworthy that while Jerusalem has indeed become a place holy not only for Jews but also for Christians and Muslims³⁹ the longed-for age of peace and reconciliation has yet to come.

In the Newer Testament, “Zion” occurs just seven times. Four usages designate not “earthly” Jerusalem but instead “eschatological” Jerusalem. Two of these four arise from quoting the book of Isaiah. According to First Peter, God lays the solid cornerstone of Jesus Christ for all believers in eschatological Zion (1 Pet. 2:6, quoting Isa. 28:16), and from there also, according to Romans, the Deliverer for all of Israel will yet come forth (Rom. 11:26, quoting Isa. 59:21 from one particular manuscript tradition of the Greek Septuagint). Then, too, according to Hebrews, it is to eschatological Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, that Christians have worshipfully “come . . . to God, the judge of all, . . . and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb. 12:22–24a). Finally, a vision in the book of Revelation describes eschatological Zion as the launch point for God’s end-time action to rid the world of evil. The Lamb (Christ) takes his stand on the solid high ground of “Mount Zion,” surrounded by 144,000 righteous faithful (Rev. 14:1), while the dragon (Satan) takes his stand on “the sand of the seashore” (Rev. 12:18), viewing from there the two beasts that are his proxies (symbolizing perhaps Rome’s emperors and priests of the imperial cult, Rev. 13:1–18). This vision of the Lamb on Mount Zion affirms Zion as the seat of justice for the world and anticipates Revelation’s later vision of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:9–22).

The other three usages of “Zion” in the Newer Testament do designate “earthly” Jerusalem. Two of these occur in gospel accounts of Jesus’ dramatic entry into that city on “Palm Sunday” (Mt. 21:5, quoting compositely from Isa. 62:11 and Zech. 9:9; and Jn. 12:15, quoting compositely from Zeph. 3:16 and Zech. 9:9). In calling to readers’ minds Zech. 9:9–10, both gospel texts affirm that Zion’s peaceable Messiah is the one who creates true shalom for the nations. The third “earthly” usage occurs in Paul’s Letter to the Romans (Rom. 9:33), where he uses the same prophetic image found in First Peter (Isa. 28:6) but employs it quite differently. Paul, interpreting this Isaian image through the lens of Isa. 8:14, speaks of God’s laying in Zion, earthly Jerusalem, “a stone” that is a stumbling block to Jewish faith—namely, the crucified and risen Christ. All three of these instances of “Zion” arise from quoting books of the prophets.

It appears that during the first century C.E., Christian authors rather fully transferred the locus of God’s concrete presence in the world of space and time from the place of Zion—that is, Jerusalem—to the person of Jesus, who had been crucified and raised from the dead just outside Jerusalem. The Roman destruction of Zion—that is, the temple in Jerusalem—in 70 C.E. doubtless hastened that process. So what do Christians make of the claim that a link endures between God’s covenant with Abraham and the promise of land?⁴⁰

Covenant and Land—and Justice

Nearly ten years ago, four American Jewish scholars offered as a basis for Jewish-Christian dialogue a set of eight propositions entitled “*Dabru ‘Emet.*”⁴¹ The third of those read, “Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.” That proposition went on to present as part of its brief rationale this comment: “As members of a biblically-based religion, Christians appreciate that Israel was promised—and given—to Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God.”

So, do we Presbyterians—collectively and/or individually—“respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel”? Do we Presbyterians “appreciate that Israel [geographic Israel? biblical Israel? political Israel?] was promised—and given—to Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God”?

Any answer to that question will be complicated and will most certainly prove controversial. At least five issues are involved in framing a context for reflecting on “*Dabru Emet’s*” third proposition and its rationale, and all of these issues are ones very much on the minds and hearts of many Presbyterians today.

First, most Presbyterians accept that the promise of offspring and land is in fact found throughout the book of Genesis⁴² and that that promise is conceptually central to God's covenant with Abraham.⁴³ Yet most Presbyterians also hold that this promise is conditioned by concepts found elsewhere in the first five books of the Bible, such as: (a) the Jubilee theology found in the book of Leviticus, according to which the land belongs fundamentally to God and is a gift from God given to ancient Israel as a *leasehold* (25:23–24, 38); (b) the Sinai-covenant theology found in the book of Deuteronomy, according to which God's gift of the land is dependent upon the people's adherence to justice and obedience to the commandments (e.g., 4:40; 16:19–20; 30:15–20)—including the prohibition against subverting the rights of “strangers” and the needy (27:19);⁴⁴ and (c) Genesis' own warning about the potential loss of the promises through deeds of injustice (18:19).

Thus, most Presbyterians hold that the “land-grant” to Abraham's offspring described in Genesis is not so much a matter of “rights” as it is a matter of “responsibilities,” that “the land” is a place whose residents God holds responsible for what is being done in and with it, including dealing justly with “the stranger” and the poor.⁴⁵

Second, Presbyterians believe that the boundaries of ancient Israel varied throughout its history—first in the days of the patriarchs and matriarchs, then under the judges and kings, then in the aftermath of exile and diaspora. Furthermore, the boundaries of “Greater Israel” that are described in the book of Exodus (Ex. 23:31), are surely not to be taken literally, for those would extend Israel's borders from the “Sea of Reeds” in the south—that is, deep into the territory of modern Egypt—to the Euphrates River in the north—that is, deep into the territory of modern Syria. And as the Jewish scholar Nahum Sarna has observed, “At no time in Israelite history, even at the height of the Davidic-Solomonic empire, were these boundaries a reality.”⁴⁶

Thus, Presbyterians believe that one cannot define “the land of Israel” with any kind of religious specificity. The varying boundaries of “the promised land” have always been more a matter of *realpolitik* than of theology.

Third, most modern Presbyterians read not with approval but with something approaching horror the theology of the accounts in Deuteronomistic literature that describe the taking of “the land” from those who had long been dwelling there by means of “holy war.”⁴⁷ One cannot evaluate as “moral” deeds that achieve a concrete realization of “land promise” through extreme “land violence.”⁴⁸ And a number of Jewish scholars agree that the acts of “holy war” described in these biblical narratives are, at the very least, morally problematic. For example, Jon Levenson has written that the narrative tradition in which the Canaanites are demonized and dismissed offers an unsavory parallel in Israel's sacred texts to the strand of anti-Semitism that runs throughout Christians' Newer Testament.⁴⁹

Thus, most Presbyterians believe that “land promise” ought not to be realized through “land violence” and that the claiming of “promised land” does not justify the displacement of “the others” who have long lived there.

Fourth, most Presbyterians agree with the apostle Paul (Romans 9–11, esp. 11:26–29) that Jews remain to this day heirs of God's covenant with Abraham. That, and not supersessionism, is what most hold.⁵⁰ Yet many Presbyterians also believe that Jews are not today's only heirs of that covenant with Abraham—that we Christians, too, are heirs of that covenant. This understanding was stated first and most authoritatively by the apostle Paul, who, in the first century C.E., wrote in his Letter to the Galatians (Gal. 3:29), “... if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.” And in modern times it has been restated this way: “Two vital communities, Judaism and

Christianity, claim direct descent from those who lived by and preserved the biblical stories; [and] a third, Islam, treasures the tradition as well.”⁵¹

Now, it is true that most Christians at most times and in most places have not strongly linked the concept of our descent from Abraham to the concept of the promise of “the land.” Still, a number of Christians throughout history have made that strong connection, and among them are some who are living in “the land” today—Palestinian Christians. Neither they nor their Palestinian Muslim cousins view themselves as filling the role of the “strangers” or “aliens” mentioned in the Older Testament.⁵²

For at least 300 years, between the fourth and seventh centuries C.E., the majority of those who lived in the Roman province of Palestine were Christians, and the city of Jerusalem, which had been the site of the death and the resurrection of Jesus the Christ, was viewed by these residents as “the Christian city *par excellence*.”

Also, many monks throughout the wider reaches of Christendom were taking to their own hearts God’s words to Abram, “Go up . . . to the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). Yes, many monks were interpreting these words as a command that God was now directing to them. So a great number of them began to pick up and move to what they were beginning to call “the Holy Land”—where Jesus had been born, had lived, had died, and had been raised from the dead.⁵³

Now, “Byzantine Palestine was, for Christians, a Holy Land but [it was] also a *homeland*, a place where men and women tilled the ground and planted orchards, built homes and raised families, bought fish and sold olives, buried parents and grandparents.” And “when Jerusalem was captured by the Persians in the seventh century of the Common Era, it was the Christians, not the Jews, who sang a lamentation over the Holy City.”⁵⁴

Then shortly after the Persian conquest came the Arab conquest—and Islam. Yet most of the Christians who were indigenous to that region continued to live there—carrying on with their everyday lives, learning to speak Arabic either in addition to or instead of Aramaic and/or Greek,⁵⁵ and continuing to worship the God made known to Abraham and made known in Jesus. Many of today’s Palestinian Christians are direct descendants of these for whom Roman Palestine had become both their homeland and their Holy Land, where the central mysteries of their Christian faith had taken place.

So, no matter how many centuries have passed since the end of the Byzantine Christian hegemony over “the land,” and no matter in how many other countries the Christian religion has since set down roots, there are in the world Christians who remain strongly wedded to the land that gave birth to both Christ and the Christian religion, and none are more strongly wedded to “the land” than those who are Palestinian Christians.⁵⁶

Then, too, of course, as early as the 6th century some Muslims considered Palestine to be their home, and from the late-7th century onward Muslims constituted the majority of Palestine’s population. Indeed, since the end of the 7th century, two of Islam’s holiest places have stood in Jerusalem—the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock.⁵⁷

Thus, Presbyterians confront a dilemma. What are Presbyterians to do when Jews and Christians and Muslims find that their continuity to the past is in part dependent upon living in the same land and in the same city, the land and the city in which both Judaism and Christianity are native and Islam has had such a significant presence for more than 1,200 years?

Fifth, Presbyterians believe that God is sovereign over all nations, states, governments, and peoples, and that God calls upon persons of faith to be critical of those governments understood to be violating God's commandments and God's standards for justice and compassion. American Presbyterians believe that God urges us to stand ready to speak "like prophets," to stand ready first and foremost to speak to our own government but also to speak to other governments. For the prophets of ancient Israel addressed their words-in-the-name-of-God not only to their own nation but to other nations as well.

Thus, if American Presbyterians are to speak "like prophets," we must stand ready to speak not only to our own government but to others as well—including the government of the State of Israel and the governments of the Palestinian people.

Throughout the sixty-two years since the British mandate over the territory of Palestine ended, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has spoken out a number of times concerning the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people. Although each of these themes has prompted spirited discussion, there have run throughout these statements four strong commitments:

- 1) To the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and legitimate borders,⁵⁸ borders that are not contended for on the basis of some literal reading of "biblical" geography and that are arrived at through peaceful negotiation with the Palestinians. And accompanying this commitment have been two calls: first, one to Palestinians and other Arabs to recognize Israel's existence within secure borders; and second, one to Israeli Jews to fulfill their "land responsibilities," responsibilities that include the covenant obligation to extend to "others" in their midst—that is, to Israeli Christians and Muslims—a full equality of civil rights and a full measure of justice.⁵⁹
- 2) To the right of Palestinians to self-determination and to have their own separate, contiguous, economically viable, sovereign nation-state within the wider borders of "the land."⁶⁰ Arising from this second commitment has been our denomination's steady call for the government of Israel to put an end to its military, political, and economic occupation of Palestinian land after 1967 and its practice of establishing and expanding settlements there.
- 3) To a nonviolent resolution to the conflict.⁶¹ The PC(USA) has continuously called upon all parties in the Middle East to settle their differences peacefully and also upon both Palestinians and Israelis to end all acts of violence against each other.
- 4) To the concept that Jerusalem, like "the land" as a whole, does not belong to any one people alone, but is rather to be shared by two peoples (Israelis and Palestinians) and three religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).⁶²

In 1987, the 199th General Assembly (1987) also received and commended to our congregations for study and reflection the paper entitled "A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews."⁶³ It is the content of this paper that undergirds the paper "Christians and Jews: People of God," which is now also before the 219th General Assembly (2010). The sixth affirmation of the 1987 paper reads, "We affirm the continuity of God's promise of the land along with the obligations of that promise to the people of Israel."⁶⁴

In the explication accompanying that affirmation are these sentences: "because land is God's to be given, it can never fully be possessed"; "the blessings of the promise were dependent upon fulfillment of covenant relationships"; "those in possession of 'land' have a responsibility and obligation to the disadvantaged, the oppressed, and the 'strangers in their gates'"; "we disavow any teaching which says that peace can be secured without justice through the exercise of violence and retribution"; and "no government at any time can ever be the full expression of God's will. All, including the State of Israel,

stand accountable to God. The State of Israel is a geopolitical entity and is not to be validated theologically.”⁶⁵

In addition, the final draft of the 2010 paper says: “God’s gift of land, and the potential and responsibility that goes with that gift, pertains both to the Jews and to the Palestinian people who live alongside them in what was the ancient, biblical land of promise. Both peoples have claims on the same land. Jews and Palestinians give voice to incompatible historical narratives and political claims, each assumed to be ‘correct’ by its narrators. What is not often clearly said in the midst of the conflict is that both people, in different ways, are recipients of God’s gift and responsibility.”⁶⁶

Finally, the 1987 paper states: “to understand [the] promise [of land] solely in terms of a specific geographical entity on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean is, in our view, inadequate. ‘Land’ is understood as more than place or property; ‘land’ is a biblical metaphor for sustainable life, prosperity, peace, and security. We affirm the rights to these essentials for the Jewish people. At the same time, as bearers of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we affirm those same rights in the name of justice to all peoples. . . . Thus we affirm our solidarity with all people to whom those rights of ‘land’ are currently denied.”⁶⁷

We have set forth the biblical emphasis on Zion as a place for all nations and peoples to worship the God of justice and learn war no more and as a place where people’s covenant responsibilities are to be fulfilled and God’s justice is to be practiced toward all persons. We have also highlighted central emphases of our denomination’s past statements and of two of its study papers. We now turn to a consideration of one other biblical concept related to the present Israeli-Palestinian crisis: reconciliation.

Reconciliation—and Justice

The Newer Testament proclaims that humankind’s alienation from God existed from the primordial time of Eden to the historical time of Jesus. But through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God accomplished a reconciliation with all of humankind—indeed, with the whole of creation. We note these passages, for example: “Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. . . . And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself’” (Jn. 12:23, 32).⁶⁸ “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10). “For in [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:19–20).⁶⁹

Furthermore, the Newer Testament proclaims that this reconciliation between God and humankind accomplished through Christ is also the ground and empowering force for reconciliation among humans—between one person and another, between the individual and the group, between one group and another—in fulfillment of the eschatological vision of peace, of shalom, found in both Micah and Isaiah: “[T]hey shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” (Mic. 4:3b, Isa. 2:4b). Ephesians says, “For [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us” (2:14). In its first century context, Ephesians was speaking of Christ’s death having broken down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles within the Christian community. But in the twenty-first century, we are led by the Spirit to find in this verse, especially when viewed through the lens of Col. 1:19–20, a wider application—Christ’s death having broken down the dividing wall of hostility between any two peoples or groups within God’s creation.

And Second Corinthians says, “For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation . . . ! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the justice of God” (2 Cor. 5:14a, 17a, 18, 21). Interpreting this last passage, J. Paul Sampley writes: “Reconciliation is at the heart of life’s business. If the most important single factor about any of our lives is God’s having reconciled us to God’s very self, then the proper celebration of our reconciliation is to share it with others by fostering reconciliation . . . wherever and whenever we can.”⁷⁰ It is in light of all this that we can hear afresh Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount: “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt. 5:23–24). By so reconciling, we do become, as Paul says, “the [justice] of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

A number of biblical accounts illustrate the processes of human reconciliation—whether frustrated or successful. We will focus here on just two: the narrative of the twins Jacob and Esau (especially Gen. 27:1–45, 33:1–17),⁷¹ and Jesus’ parable of The Man and His Two Sons (Lk. 15:11–32).

Stolid Esau was his father Isaac’s favorite son, while wily Jacob was his mother Rebekah’s. Jacob had already duped Esau, the first-born twin, into selling his birthright (Gen. 25:27–34). Then, through an ancient version of identity theft, Jacob tricked blind-old Isaac into bestowing on him the paternal blessing Isaac intended for Esau (Gen. 27:1–29). When Esau learned of his lost blessing, he hated Jacob, yet bided his time until the opportune moment to kill him (Gen. 27:35–41). Rebekah warned Jacob of Esau’s plan and sent him away to the home of her brother Laban outside Canaan, far to the northeast in distant Haran (Gen. 27:42–45).

Twenty years passed (Gen. 31:38–41), during which Jacob married first Leah and then Rachel (Gen. 29:1–30), begot eleven sons and a daughter (Gen. 29:31–30:24), and prospered at Laban’s expense (Gen. 30:25–43). Laban’s sons became angry at Jacob, so Jacob started to flee back to his home country of Canaan with his wives, children, and great wealth of livestock (Gen. 31:1–21). Laban chased them down, for one of the party had stolen his household gods (Gen. 31:22–32). Laban never found the gods (Gen. 31:33–35), yet in the end he made a covenant with Jacob that let him depart in peace (Gen. 31:36–55).

Jacob now feared that when he got home Esau would exact revenge; and when Jacob learned that Esau was coming to meet him accompanied by 400 men, he thought the worst and, to appease his twin, sent ahead a huge offering of livestock (Gen. 32:1–21).

That same night, when Jacob was alone, a “man” came and wrestled long and hard with him, finally at daybreak throwing Jacob’s hip out of joint (Gen. 32:22–25). The “man” then bestowed on the exhausted Jacob a new name, Israel, and, after blessing him, departed (Gen. 32:26–29). In the end, Jacob came to believe that the “man” was really God (Gen. 32:30–32).

Jacob next saw Esau and his retinue approaching. He arranged the women and children of his caravan defensively and limped ahead to meet his twin, bowing submissively to the ground seven times as he proceeded (Gen. 33:1–3). “But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept” (Gen. 33:4; compare Lk. 15:20!). Having thus shown his forgiveness of Jacob, Esau greeted the women and children and told Jacob he would not keep his offering, for he already had quite enough livestock (Gen. 33:5–9). Jacob, however, insisted that Esau keep the gift, and Esau at last agreed (Gen. 33:10–11).

Esau, far from harboring bitterness or exacting revenge against Jacob, had initiated a model reconciliation, and it would seem that Jacob had completed it. Jacob, reflecting on his previous night's wrestling with God, had even said to Esau, "[T]o see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor" (Gen. 33:10b). Yet in the end Jacob remained characteristically untrusting and wily. In spite of having seen "the face of God" and received a new name, he had had no experience of "new being," of "new creation." So when Esau first volunteered to travel onward with him and then offered to lend him some men for help along his way, Jacob refused both offers, preferring that Esau's future not be linked to his (Gen. 33:12–15). So the two parted and went their separate ways (Gen. 33:16–17).

Thus, Jacob kept Esau out of his future life, and they met only once more—coming together to bury their father Isaac (Gen. 35:28–29). Basically, theirs was but a partial reconciliation, its full success having been frustrated—perhaps by Jacob's continuing suspicion of Esau, perhaps by his inability to accept Esau's forgiveness, but most certainly by his insistence on going his separate way.

Family dynamics, sibling rivalry, and offered reconciliation also lie at the heart of Jesus' parable of The Man and His Two Sons (Lk. 15:11–32). Like all of Jesus' parables, this one lends itself richly to multiple interpretations. For example, the "man" can be seen variably, and correctly, as either a God-figure or a model human parent. The latter reading is followed here, where the parable is interpreted as a story of both successful human reconciliation (father and younger son) and frustrated human reconciliation (elder brother and younger brother, father and elder son).⁷²

The younger son asked his father prematurely, and insultingly, for his inheritance, yet surprisingly he was given it. He went off to a far country and there wasted it "in dissolute living" (Lk. 15:11–13). So this Jewish lad was reduced to slopping and feeding the hogs, while he himself, in the midst of a famine, had nothing at all to eat (Lk. 15:14–16). Finally, "he came to himself" and realized he would be far better off at home, even as a hired hand. So, feeling quite contrite, he thought through his speech of repentance and headed back to his father (Lk. 15:17–20a).

While this son was still a distance away, his father caught sight of him "and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him" (Lk. 15:20b; compare Gen. 33:4!). The son began his speech of repentance, but the father interrupted him and commanded the servants to bring for this son a robe, ring, and sandals and to prepare a special feast. A joyful celebration followed, completing the reconciliation between father and son, a reconciliation brought about through the son's humble acts of repentance and truth-telling and the father's gracious acts of forgiveness and amnesty (Lk. 15:21–24).

But the elder son had received no speech of repentance from his brother. Instead, upon returning from his work in the field, he encountered an unexpected feast of celebration. Puzzled, he learned secondhand of his younger brother's return and restored sonship (Lk. 15:25–27). Angered at the injustice of the whole situation and jealous of what he perceived to be his father's favoritism toward his brother, the elder son refused to enter. So his father came out and pleaded with him. The elder son spoke angry and jealous words to his father, yet the father answered him with words that proclaimed both his enduring constancy toward his elder son and his newborn reconciliation with his younger son (Lk. 15:28–32).

Jesus' parable concludes without any resolution between these two figures but with the ball in the elder son's court, so to speak. Would he remain unreconciled to his father, either resentful forever or leaving the ranch altogether? Would he remain unreconciled to his younger brother, either entering the party sullenly and unforgivingly or turning on his heel and walking away? Then, too, would the younger brother ever have the chance, or the desire, to apologize to his elder brother and tell him the truth? Would

the elder brother ever take the opportunity to forgive his brother and, like their father, offer him amnesty? Could a reconciliation between these brothers succeed without “justice” being done, and what would “justice” look like in this situation? Jesus left the answers to all these questions to our imagination—or rather, for our discernment.

It is tempting to apply the first of these two narratives to the present situation in the Middle East by identifying Esau with either the Israelis or the Palestinians and then Jacob with the other. One of the “brothers” has wronged the other, has never asked for forgiveness, and, despite the best overtures of the other, has perpetuated a separation that frustrates reconciliation and the realization of justice. Yet perhaps the real-world complication to such an application is that the historical parties have in fact been continually switching roles, in one instance playing the part of Esau and in the next playing that of Jacob.

Likewise it is tempting to apply the second of these biblical narratives by identifying the younger brother with either the Israelis or the Palestinians and then the elder brother with the other—acknowledging with regret that neither party seems to display the full virtue of the father. One of the “brothers” has wronged the other and has not yet acknowledged that wrong to the other and asked for forgiveness. Meanwhile the other brother is intent on demanding the kind of justice that is retributive rather than restorative. Again, perhaps the real-world complication to such an application is that the historical parties have in fact been continually switching roles, now playing the elder brother and then the younger brother.

Still, these two narratives frame for us ever so importantly the theological elements involved in human reconciliation—the needs for speaking truth, acknowledging wrong, accepting responsibility, asking pardon, offering forgiveness (and even amnesty), finding a just way to live side by side, and becoming “the [justice] of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Keeping in mind all four of the biblical and theological emphases studied in this opening section—justice, Zion, covenant and land, and reconciliation—and the relationship of each of the latter three to the first, we will now provide perspectives on the contemporary situation in the Middle East.

D. Our Witness: "What We Have Seen and Heard"

Introduction

The Middle East Study Committee (MESC) was created by the 218th General Assembly (2008) and appointed February 2009 by the current and two previous moderators.⁷³ The members of the MESC are: Susan Andrews, Hudson River Presbytery (New York); Frederick Bush, Los Ranchos Presbytery (California); Nahida Gordon, Presbytery of Muskingum Valley (Ohio); John Huffman, Los Ranchos Presbytery (California); Lucy Janjigian, Palisades Presbytery (New York); Rebecca Reyes, New Hope Presbytery (North Carolina); Marthame Sanders, Greater Atlanta Presbytery (Georgia); Byron Shafer, New York City Presbytery (New York); Ron Shive, Salem Presbytery (North Carolina).

Our mandate was "to prepare a comprehensive study, with recommendations, that is focused on Israel/Palestine within the complex context of the Middle East" (*Minutes*, 2008, Part I, p. 1226). The scope of this study is fourfold:

- A description of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s mission and relationships, including an assessment of the future for the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East;
- An overview of the complex interactions among religions, cultures, and peoples that characterize the region;
- An analysis of U.S. policies that impact the area; and
- A [recommendation of] steps to be taken with our partners in the Middle East and the United States to foster justice, improve interfaith relations, and nurture the building of peace toward a secure and viable future for all. (*Minutes*, 2008, Part I, p. 1226)

The methodology for the study has been to engage as many representatives from a spectrum of perspectives on the Israel-Palestinian conflict and to embrace the witness and concerns of our Christian partners in the region. This approach involved conversations both in the United States and in the Middle East; with both Israelis and Palestinians; Jews, Muslims, and Christians. We have worked diligently to listen to the multitude of voices that are crying aloud in the midst of the Middle East conflict.⁷⁴ We have also consulted the Presbyterian Panel through its August 2009 survey for a sample of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) convictions and attitudes regarding Israel/Palestine, and learned much about the extent to which Presbyterians care about the parties involved in the conflict.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, we must acknowledge that limited time, resources, and other circumstances prevented us from engaging some voices.⁷⁶ This report thus makes only limited observations and recommendations regarding the broader context, and devotes most summary here to the Israel-Palestine struggle. The Presbyterian Church has in fact spoken prophetically on matters such as the Iraq war and its refugees and developed policies on just peacemaking that address the larger region. These also include the dynamics of Iran and preemptive warfare and are part of the policy review and application found in Appendix 2. We mention this here because our study, though with new approaches, also acknowledges this very Presbyterian history of social and ethical analysis of the Middle East.

Two Unparalleled Experiences

One does not have to be in the Middle East long before becoming aware of the two unparalleled traumatic experiences that grip the lives of the people of this region. The horror that both the Jews and the Palestinians have faced is unparalleled and has resulted in a state of psycho-trauma, which grips the lives

of both people and results in fear, anxiety, and anger. The Jewish psycho-trauma and the Palestinian psycho-trauma, both of which underlie the region's conflicts, cannot be compared, nor should they be allowed to compete with one another. A competition of traumas will only result in an endless argument over who is the greater victim.

One of these psycho-traumas is the Holocaust in which 6 million European Jews were annihilated at the hands of the Nazi party, its state apparatus and allies. The other trauma is the forced displacement of 750,000 Palestinians in 1948 from their ancestral homeland by the Israel Haganah [the pre-state militant force that was the precursor of the Israel Defense Forces].

Avraham Burg, Former Speaker of the Knesset and Cabinet Minister, speaks of the Jewish psycho-trauma and identifies the pain and power that the Holocaust still plays in the soul of Israelis today. He says,

To many, the Shoah [Holocaust or literally calamity] was and will forever be an incurable wound. To others, the Shoah is the nucleus of their identity. To everyone, the Shoah is a present, tangible experience wherever we go.⁷⁷

Another has described this Jewish trauma well:

To Israelis and most Jews, the Jewish State is a miracle that represents redemption from the unspeakable horrors of the Nazi Holocaust. Israel is an emotional insurance policy against the visceral vulnerability that many Jews still feel, a vulnerability born of centuries of persecution in Europe.⁷⁸

One of the results of this psycho-trauma is that every time the Palestinians, or the Iranians, or any other neighbor offer a threat, the Israeli Jews become engulfed in fear, their perceived vulnerability is heightened, and the question that arises is, "Is a second Shoah on the way?"⁷⁹

The atrocities that the Nazis committed against the Jews and this resulting psycho-trauma has become for many a rationalization to do whatever is necessary to maintain Israel's security. Again, Burg says,

Since those days in Germany, we have been holding on painfully to the little that we have, not letting go. We hold the memories and the traumas and they do not leave us. We cling to the tragedy and the tragedy becomes our justification for everything else.⁸⁰

This sense of historical victimization creates for some Israelis a compensatory reflex to choose power and armament; to reject the claims and critique of others; and the adoption of a philosophy that the "end justifies the means," even if that means the loss of human rights, life, and the dignity of others.⁸¹

The second psycho-trauma that one encounters in the Middle East is the trauma brought by Nakba [The Catastrophe], as the Palestinians call it, or the War of Independence, as the Israelis term the event. The term "Nakba" does not refer to the establishment of Israel itself, but rather the effect that the war had on the Palestinian people. This war resulted in the displacement of 750,000 Palestinians in 1948 from their ancestral homeland. This was a violent displacement and is overwhelmingly experienced as a delegitimization of the Palestinian people. This is described well by Naim Ateek, a Palestinian Anglican priest and the president and director of Sabeel⁸² in Jerusalem.

On Israel's Independence Day in 1958 the Israeli military governor had allowed the Palestinian Arabs living in Israel to move around without permits. My father took advantage of this temporary freedom to rent a pickup truck and take all of his children back for the first time to see our home in the town of Beisan, the home from which we had been forced out nine years earlier. Even today I clearly remember how we were not allowed even to look inside our home. The three houses built by my father that made up our home had been divided into smaller units, each occupied now by a Jewish immigrant family. It must have been very difficult for my father to see our house occupied by Jewish immigrants who had come from North Africa while he, the rightful owner, was prevented even from entering them. A few days after this traumatic experience, my father suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered, leaving him unable to walk or speak clearly.⁸³

The inexplicable pain of the Nakba creates for some Palestinians a sense of historical victimization, which creates a compensatory reflex to choose violence; to reject the claims and critique of others; and the adoption of a philosophy that the “end justifies the means.”⁸⁴ The awareness of the Nakba is renewed every time a bulldozer knocks down a Palestinian house or uproots an olive tree, posing the constant moral test of how to respond non-violently—as almost all always do.

With both the Israeli Holocaust and the Palestinian Nakba, empathy is weakened, humiliation is remembered, hopelessness and fear increased, and when they confront each other “horns are locked.”

The defensive reaction seen by some in both communities is to move away from democracy and toward fundamentalism, theocracy, and exclusivism. This exclusivism is manifested in two peoples who have often looked at the world around them solely through the lenses of their own trauma, and who thereby fail to see the whole picture. Each people have become compartmentalized, resulting in further misunderstanding and conflict. This compartmentalization prevents each from knowing what is happening to the other and failing to accurately understand the other’s viewpoint. The walls or borders of each compartment become blinders that obscure the reality of the situation.⁸⁵

Compartmentalization also leads to living in isolation, permitting each party to think that their mistreatment of the other is both good and proper. “It is just the way it is.”⁸⁶ This has led some Zionists, who see themselves as an embattled minority, to justify the occupation and the invasion of Gaza because it is for Israel’s security. Likewise, this has led some extremist Arabs, who see themselves as the oppressed, to resort to violent resistance. Either way, “each side sees itself as a victim and the other side as an instigator.”⁸⁷

“The emotional baggage of the Holocaust and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians affect people’s perceptions of the objective reality of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, a reality in which people are being killed. One side may perceive the blowing up a bus or a disco as justified retaliation; the other side may perceive the isolation of Gaza and the killing of far greater numbers of Palestinians with tanks and F-16s as justified retaliation. The objective reality remains the same: people are dying.”⁸⁸

We believe that the one person’s pain does not justify the inflicting of pain on another. We also believe that breaking through the conflict created by both of these psycho-traumas is possible only with the work of outside parties. Both sides are so “locked in horns” that a third party breakthrough is imperative. This “outside-assisted breakthrough” must come from the U.S. government (which is a primary supporter of Israel), American Jewish voices for a just peace, Christian churches both within the Middle East and worldwide, and the many moderate Muslims who embrace a vision for peace.

Dwindling Christian Presence and Influence

The Christian community has maintained an unbroken presence and witness in Jerusalem since Pentecost, gradually spreading throughout Palestine, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean world.⁸⁹ There is continuing concern about the numbers of Christians remaining in the Middle East and particularly in Palestine. This was the message that was clearly heard from our Christian partners, particularly in Lebanon and Israel.

At present it is estimated that 9,246,000 to 16,206,000 Christians live in the Middle East. Currently, Christians have been emigrating from the Middle East, and reasons for the outmigration vary by country. Political upheavals in Lebanon; discrimination in Israel, Egypt, and Iran; the occupation and economic decline in the West Bank and Gaza; and security and discrimination in Iraq are some of the reasons. There

are political reasons to try to inflate the numbers; we are told that the actual numbers are closer to the lower ends of each range. Christians in Jordan and Syria appear to experience the least difficulties in the Middle East; however numbers are reported to be declining there as well. The Table below provides estimates by country⁹⁰

Country	Estimated Numbers	Percentage of Population	Reasons for Decline
Lebanon	1.35 M ¹ to 1.6 M	34–41%	Political Situation
Israel	144 K ² to 196 K	2.1–2.8%	Discrimination
West Bank and Gaza	40 K–90 K	1.1–2.4%	Occupation, Economic Decline
Egypt	5.8 M–11 M	8–16%	Discrimination
Syria	970K–1.7 M	5.4–9.4%	None given
Jordan	163 K–220 K	3–4%	None given
Iraq	700 K–1 M	2.7–3.5%	Security
Iran	79 K–400K	0.1–0.6%	Discrimination
Gulf States	2,048.9 K to 2,083.9 K		

¹ ‘M’ denotes ‘Million’; ² ‘K’ denotes ‘Thousand’

Although the numbers of Christians in Israel and the Palestinian Territories have remained steady, or may have even increased slightly, they have not kept pace with the normal rate of population growth. Their proportions have declined significantly and their influence greatly diminished. The reduction to the present 1.37 percent in the proportion of Christians⁹¹ is attributed to lower birth rates and the higher rates of outmigration,⁹² which result from the occupation with its difficulties for daily life. A further concern of this outmigration is that those able to migrate, either Christian or Muslim, are those with education and whose political views are “liberals or seculars” thus tending to leave behind a greater proportion of those on the extremes in political orientation.⁹³

This dwindling presence of Christians in the Middle East is a deep concern due to the role that Christians have played in being a mediating, reconciling presence. Without that presence, we fear a more religiously polarized Middle East, more prone to extremism.

Refugees in the Middle East

As a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict, 750,000 Palestinians became refugees. The 1967 war resulted in an additional 140,000 refugees in Jordan and 240,000 in the West Bank. It is currently estimated that there are 4.7 million registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and Gaza. The massive numbers of Palestinian refugees in surrounding countries continues to cause concern, conflict, and anger on the part of our respective partners there. For there to be a just peace, Palestinian refugees must be offered the right to return or compensation for their home and lands. One Jewish author has poignantly remarked, “Can the United States stop its support of Israel’s military and instead support Israel by offering to help in the repatriation of Palestinian refugees? We can, and we should.”⁹⁴

Increasing Nuclear Threat

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported on February 8, 2010, the following news.

The IAEA can confirm that it has received a letter from the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) on 8 February 2010, in which the AEOI informed the Agency that production of less than 20 percent enriched uranium is being foreseen at the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant at Natanz for fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor.⁹⁵

The IAEA then reported ten days later that they had extensive evidence of “past or current undisclosed activities” by Iran’s military to develop a nuclear warhead.⁹⁶

That news sent waves of fear through Israelis and fueled their sense of vulnerability and insecurity.

While this growing fear is a deep concern, an equal concern is the number of nuclear warheads that Israel currently stockpiles and thus the growing sense of Iranian vulnerability and insecurity. While Israel will not confirm its possession of nuclear weapons or the number held, it is generally agreed that Israel has stockpiled close to 100 nuclear weapons.⁹⁷

The only just and peaceful solution to this growing concern is to work for a nuclear-free Middle East in both Iran and Israel.

Reality on the Ground in Israel-Palestine

1) Violence by Both Extremes

Inexcusable acts of violence have been committed by both the powerful occupying forces of the Israeli military and the Jewish settlers in the West Bank,⁹⁸ as well as, the Palestinians, of whom a relatively small minority has resorted to violence as a means of resisting the occupation.⁹⁹ Violence is not an acceptable means to peace, regardless of its rationale.

The Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza

As the MESC traveled throughout the region, the overwhelming consensus of all members was that Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is a sin against God and other fellow human beings. While there are many subordinate factors that contribute to the lack of a just peace in Israel-Palestine, the major issue for a just peace is the continued occupation that has been ongoing for the past forty-three years.

The real concern that we all embrace is that the window of opportunity for an end to the occupation and the viability of a two-state solution is rapidly closing. This is due in large part to the rapid growth of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the increasing number of bypass roads, the injustice of the separation barrier, and tragic numbers of house demolitions.

One of the growing concerns of the occupation is the dramatic increase of settlements that began after the 1967 war. One of the hopes of the Oslo Interim agreements was that settlement growth would cease; however, the opposite has occurred, resulting in a current population of the West Bank settlements at 285,000 and 198,700 settlers in East Jerusalem.¹⁰⁰ The continued growth of the number of settlements and settlers is perceived by many as an attempt by Israel to prevent the establishment of an economically viable Palestinian state.

Another concern of the occupation is the number of “Israeli-only bypass roads” that carve up the Palestinian homeland and connect one settlement to another. This has a devastating effect on the ability of Palestinian residents to live out a normal life—to visit family, farm family property; to seek medical treatment; to secure employment; and to travel freely in one’s own country.

The separation barrier at times is an imposing twenty-six feet high, concrete wall and at other times, in less densely populated areas, it is a barbed-wire topped fence. Israeli supporters of the barrier argue that the wall is necessary to protect Israeli citizens in Israel and its West Bank settlements from Palestinian terrorists and attribute the decrease of incidents of suicide bombers to the existence of the barrier. While few would deny the right of any government to put a barrier on its own property line, thus along the 1967 borders, three-quarters of this barrier is inside the West Bank on Palestinian land.¹⁰¹ This is often perceived by the Palestinians as an effort to secure an illegal settlement, claim water sources, and annex Palestinian land. The location of the barrier is a violation of international law and thus is perceived as a means to preempt a just peace.

The number of house demolitions is alarming and shocks the human conscience. It is estimated that some 24,145 Palestinian homes have been demolished in the Occupied Territories since 1967¹⁰² and that some 4,247 Palestinian homes were demolished in the Gaza Strip during Operation Cast Lead.¹⁰³ The Israeli reason given for these demolitions are as follows: houses demolished for lack of a building permit, houses demolished as punishment for the actions of people associated with the houses, and houses demolished by the IDF in the course of military operations.¹⁰⁴ Regardless of the reason, the demolition of houses is a tragic human experience for Palestinian homeowners and an unnecessary action if there were no occupation.

A just and lasting peace and security for Israel is possible when the occupation has ended and the Palestinian acts of violent resistance are no longer employed. A just and lasting peace and security for the Palestinians is possible when the occupation has ended and Israel does not need to resort to military force to maintain its illegal land possession. If there were no occupation, there would be no Palestinian resistance. If there was no Palestinian resistance, Israelis could live in peace and security.

The Israeli occupation leads to the denial of many human rights and the violation of international laws. The violent forms of Palestinian resistance to the occupation also leads to violations of international law. The only just solution is to insist that both Palestinians and Israelis abide by international law and justly respect the human rights of all. Double standards must give way to equal justice for all, which will result in peace for all.

Palestinian Christians: Agents of Reconciliation and Nonviolent Resistance

In the Middle East the voice of our Christian partners, though increasingly small, is both vital and promising.¹⁰⁵ While their percentage of the population continues to decline due to the Israel-Palestine conflict and the resulting political struggles and economic pressures, their unified witness in the recent past has been clear, concise, and challenging. In June 2007, the World Council of Churches brought together an international peace conference in Amman, Jordan. An urgent ecumenical plea, known now as “The Amman Call,”¹⁰⁶ came out of this gathering. This document was a call for churches to step forward in their role to “heal and to bring all sides to reconciliation.” In addition it called for the Palestinian right of return, a two-state solution that is “viable politically, geographically, economically and socially,” and a shared Jerusalem. From our partners we all took seriously their cry, “Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action.” Hearing this plea, the 218th General Assembly (2008) endorsed and affirmed “The Amman Call.”

The Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) was launched out of this initial gathering in Amman and during the next two years it continued to meet, encouraging the writing of a defining statement from our Palestinian partners.¹⁰⁷ In December 2009, the forum met again in Bethlehem, Palestine, and there witnessed the unveiling of a Palestinian Christian statement: “Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth, A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering.”¹⁰⁸

This Kairos Palestine document is a cry for the international community to stand with the Palestinian Christians who have faced great oppression and suffering. It is a call for us as Christians to oppose occupation theologies and to work for a just peace. This document clearly calls the occupation “a sin against God and humanity” and thus must be opposed by all who are concerned for justice and peace in the Middle East. It reaffirms “the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Al-Quds [East Jerusalem] as its capital.” Throughout the document, even in the face of the separation wall that illegally confiscates Palestinian land and the growing number of settlements that recreate a growing obstacle to a political solution and Israel’s disregard of international law, the tone is one of hope and the method embraced is peaceful, nonviolent resistance. Kairos Palestine focuses, above all, on love and reconciliation.

While Kairos Palestine calls for divestment and boycott of everything produced by the occupation as an act of conscience and a method of nonviolent resistance, it lifts this up as part of the Christian affirmation of speaking truth in love. We struggle with its call for solidarity in this area and confess that we have not fully answered it.

The hopes and prayers are that the Kairos Palestine document will “provide the turning point to focus all peace-loving peoples in the world,” because “liberation from the occupation is in the interest of all peoples in the region.”

A Time for Action

One last observation that the Middle East Study Committee encountered in the Middle East was the disparity between the fierce urgency felt by many whose lives focus on solving the conflict and the lack of urgency felt by many others whose lives are more removed from day-to-day contact with the conflict. Many give so much energy to the ending of the occupation and the resolution of a just peace; and, on the other hand, many simply are willing to live with the disparity of justice, perhaps because the insecurity of the current status quo is perceived to be better than the fear of the unknown that a dramatic change would bring.

On the floor of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, the words attributed to Martin Niemoller, which he wrote as an anti-Nazi German pastor, read:

First, they came for the socialist, and I did not speak out, because I was not a socialist.
 Then they came for the trade unionist, and I did not speak out, because I was not a trade unionist.
 Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out, because I was not a Jew.
 Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.

We all do have a shared responsibility to guard human rights everywhere,¹⁰⁹ and now is the time for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to speak out, stand up, and take action. We must be those who will say, “Never again” not just for the Jew, but for every suffering victim in the world today,¹¹⁰ including the Palestinians.

Endnotes

1. See Appendix 2, General Assembly Policy Review
2. Eph. 2:14.
3. 2 Cor. 5:16–20.
4. The Middle East Study Committee is deeply thankful for the gracious welcome and engaging conversations that we had during this time with our Middle Eastern Christian partners, their Jewish and Muslim neighbors, and other political and religious leaders.
5. The terminology for the two testaments of the Christian Bible used throughout this paper is “Older Testament” and “Newer Testament,” following a suggestion made in another paper that is before the 219th General Assembly (2010), “Christians and Jews: People of God.” “Older”/“Newer” emphasizes that the relationship between the two testaments is one of chronology, not of supersession. That is, the Newer Testament has not superseded the Older and has not rendered the Older obsolete and without authority.
6. In Judaism, these books are divided into three sections: the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy), first in its hierarchy of biblical authority; the Prophets (the books of the major and minor prophets, excluding Daniel, plus Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings), second in its hierarchy of biblical authority; and the Writings (all the other books, including Daniel), third in its hierarchy of biblical authority.
7. *Mishnah*, Tractate Abot 1:18, as translated by Judah Goldin in *The Living Talmud* (Mentor Books, 1957), p. 75.
8. From “*Perek Ha-shalom*,” an appendix to “*Derek Eretz Zuta*,” a minor treatise in the *Babylonian Talmud*, as quoted from Avi Weinstein, “My Truth or Our Peace, You Choose!!,” p. 3 of 4. Weinstein also provides a Hebrew text of the saying. His paper was accessed on October 26, 2009, at the website: www.hillel.org/NR/rdonlyres/729CB895-1832-4F6A-9585-3944D435E190/0/truth_or_peace.pdf.
9. Please note that in the Newer Testament, the Greek word *dikaios* may often be translated “just” even in texts where the NRSV translates it “righteous,” and that *dikaiosune* may often be translated “justice” even in texts where the NRSV translates it “righteousness.” In many of the NT texts quoted below, “just” and “justice” translate *dikaios* and *dikaiosune*. In others, “justice” translates the Greek word *krisis*.
10. See, for example, Suras 4:58, 4:105, 4:135; 5:9; 7:29; 16:90; and 57:25.
11. As preserved by Bayhaqi from ‘Umar’s son, according to the anthology of *hadith* entitled *Mishkat al-Masabih (Niches of Lamps)*, compiled by al-Khatib al-Tibrizi. Translated by John Alden Williams, in *Themes of Islamic Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 67.
12. Translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, in *The Holy Qur’an* (Islamic Propagation Centre International, 1946), p. 223; not printed stichometrically here, unlike Ali’s translation.
13. *Sifre Deut. 16* (ed. Meir Friedmann, Vienna, 1864, p. 68b), as quoted by Wilhelm Bacher, in “Simeon (Ben Gamaliel II),” *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (Funk and Wagnalls, 1901–1906): accessed on October 26, 2009, at www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=732&letter=S.

- ¹⁴. Footnote 621 (p. 214) in Ali's translation of *The Holy Qur'an* [see above, fn. 12].
- ¹⁵. Isa. 28:17; 59:14–15; Hos. 10:13; Mt. 22:16; Jn. 18:37–38.
- ¹⁶. Ex. 23:6; Deut. 10:18; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 5:28; 22:3, 16; Pss. 72:2–4, 82:3–4, 140:12, 146:7; Mt. 1:19, 25:37–40; Lk. 4:18–21, 7:22, 14:13, 16:19–31.
- ¹⁷. Deut. 10:18; 24:17, 19; Mt. 7:12; Lk. 7:1–10, 10:25–37.
- ¹⁸. Jer. 21:11, 22:3; Lk. 19:1–9.
- ¹⁹. Dan. 4:37; Mt. 23:12; Lk. 1:51.
- ²⁰. Deut. 1:16–17, 16:19; Ezek. 18:8; 2 Chr. 19:7; Lk. 18:2–5. Unjust judgments are illustrated by Herod Antipas' beheading of John the Baptist (Mt. 14:3–12) and Pilate's crucifixion of Jesus (Lk. 23:13–25).
- ²¹. Isa. 1:17, 58:6; Jer. 21:12, 22:17; Ezek. 18:7; Pss. 72:4, 103:6, 146:7; Mk. 12:38–40; Lk. 1:51–53, 4:18, 19:1–8.
- ²². 1 Kings 11:38; Ezek. 18:5–9; Ps. 19:9; Mt. 5:17–20; Mk. 12:28–34; Lk. 1:5–6; Rom. 2:13, 8:4; Phil. 3:6b.
- ²³. Lk. 23:50–51; Jn. 5:30; Eph. 5:9–10; 1 Jn. 3:7b.
- ²⁴. Isa. 9:7, 32:16–17; Mk. 9:50; Lk. 1:78–79; Jas. 3:18.
- ²⁵. Jer. 22:3, 17; Mt. 6:24; Lk. 19:1–8; Isa. 1:21, 5:7; Mt. 27:3–4; Lk. 13:1; Mt. 11:12; Acts 12:1–2; Hos. 10:13; Ps. 33:16–17.
- ²⁶. *Islam: The Straight Path*, expanded ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 30–31.
- ²⁷. 2 Sam 5:6–7a.
- ²⁸. 2 Sam. 5:7b; 1 Kings 8:1.
- ²⁹. Pss. 20:2–3, 76:2, 78:68–69.
- ³⁰. Isa. 8:18; Pss. 48:12–14, 65:1–4, 74:2c, 76:2, 132:13–14; cf. Deut. 12:5; 1 Kings 8:28–29.
- ³¹. Pss. 50:2, 84:7; cf. Isa. 6:1–8.
- ³². 2 Kings 19:20–21, 31; Ps. 87:1–3; Isa. 10:24, 30:19, 33:20; Lam. 2:8–10.
- ³³. Isa. 51:16; Zech. 2:7 NIV/KJV, 9:13.
- ³⁴. Isa. 35:10; 46:13; 51:3, 11; 61:1–4; 62:1, 11–12; Joel 3:17; Zeph. 3:14–20; Zech. 1:14–17, 2:10–13, 8:3–8; Pss. 69:35–36, 102:12–22, 126:1–3.
- ³⁵. Isa. 2:2–4; Micah 4:1–4; Zech. 9:9–10.

- ³⁶ Jer. 50:4–5; Zech. 9:11–13.
- ³⁷ Cf. Gen. 6:9, 17:1; Deut. 18:13 NIV. Zeph. 2:3MT (Masoretic Text). Jer. 9:5; Zech. 8:16. Jer. 32:31–32, 44:2–3. Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:37; Deut. 23:19. Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19, 27:25; Prov. 17:23. Ps. 125:1.
- ³⁸ Cf. Deut. 24:15MT (Masoretic Text); Hos. 4:8MT; Ex. 20:7MT, 23:1MT. Lev. 19:12; Jer. 5:2, 7:9; Mal. 3:5. Deut. 6:25MT, 24:13MT.
- ³⁹ Quoting from the note on Ps. 87:4–6 by Patrick D. Miller, a professor emeritus of Princeton Theological Seminary, in *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, fully revised and updated edition, edited by Harold W. Attridge *et al.* [HarperSanFrancisco, 2006], p. 803.
- ⁴⁰ Jerusalem is holy to Muslims primarily because of the Prophet Muhammad’s Night Journey (*al-Isra’*), during which: he was transported on the winged beast *Buraq* from Mecca to Jerusalem; he prayed there with Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets; and he then ascended from the rock of the Jewish Temple Mount to the Divine Presence through the seven heavens (*al-Mi’raj*). Both the Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock were built at the end of the 7th century to commemorate that journey and experience.
- ⁴¹ This section has addressed only the biblical uses of the term “Zion” and does not at all address the phenomenon of either Jewish Zionism or Christian Zionism. Jewish Zionism is too complex and diverse a set of historical movements to be defined or described in brief. For a Jewish perspective, go to: www.mideastweb.org/zionism.htm. For a Palestinian perspective, see the presentation by Professor Munther S. Dajani, “Judaism and Zionism and Human Rights from a Palestinian Perspective.” Do a Google search by entering “Munther S. Dajani” and “Judaism and Zionism”; then click on “(Cached)”. For a PC(USA) document describing Christian Zionism, go to: www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/21christianzionism.pdf.
- ⁴² The date was Sept. 10, 2000, and the four scholars were Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, and Michael Signer. The text of “*Dabru ‘Emet*” can be found at: www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=1014.
- ⁴³ Gen. 12:2, 7; 15:5–7, 18; 17:3–8; 24:7; 26:2–5; 28:4, 15; 35:11–12; 48:3–4, 21–22; 50:24–25.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. Ex. 2:24–25, 6:8, 32:13, 33:1; Lev. 26:42; Deut. 1:8, 34:4; Ps. 105:7–11; 1 Chr. 16:14–18.
- ⁴⁵ The Hebrew word *ger*, translated “stranger” or “sojourner” or “alien,” designates foreigners who live among the Israelites. “Strangers” were not full members of ancient Israelite society and were considered to be of lower status, but they were afforded a measure of legal protection. Needless to say, Palestinians do not consider themselves to be “strangers” in the land, and this term should not be interpreted as in any way describing them.
- ⁴⁶ See, for example, the book by W. Eugene March, former dean of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, entitled *Israel and the Politics of Land: A Theological Case Study* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 53–57.
- ⁴⁷ In the *Exodus* volume of the Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, 1991), p. 149.

^{48.} E.g., Deut. 2:31–36, 3:3–7, 7:1–6, 13:12–18, 20:16–18; Josh. 6:20–21, 8:24–29, 10:34–42, 11:10–12, 11:18–20; Judg. 1:17; 1 Sam. 15:1–3.

^{49.} See the preface to the second edition of *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), by Walter Brueggemann, a professor emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, p. xiv.

^{50.} “Is There a Counterpart in the Hebrew Bible to New Testament Antisemitism?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22 (1985), 242–260.

^{51.} “Supersessionism” holds that Christians have supplanted Jews so that now Christians are the only legitimate heirs of God’s covenant with Abraham. See also fn. 5.

^{52.} March, *Israel and the Politics of Land* (fn. 46 above), p. 68.

^{53.} See the text above at fnn. 45 and 46.

^{54.} Robert Wilken, in *No Religion Is an Island: The Nostra Aetate Dialogues*, ed. Edward Bristow (Fordham University Press, 1998), pp. 128–129. For much greater detail, see Wilken’s *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

^{55.} Wilken, in *No Religion*, pp. 129–130.

^{56.} See Sidney Griffith, “From Aramaic to Arabic: The Languages of the Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods,” in the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997), 11–31.

^{57.} See Wilken, in *No Religion*, p. 133.

^{58.} See fn. 40.

^{59.} See, for example, the General Assembly statements of 1974 (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1974, Part I, p. 584), 1978 (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1978, Part I, p. 276; *Minutes*, PCUS, 1978, Part I, p. 39), 1987 (*Minutes*, 1987, Part I, p. 870), 1995 (*Minutes*, 1995, Part I, pp. 688–89), and 2003 (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, pp. 635–37, Item B.1.). The phrase “the right of Israel to exist” is a source of pain for some members of the 2009–2010 Middle East Study Committee, who are in solidarity with Palestinians who feel that the state of Israel has denied them their inalienable human rights.

^{60.} See, for example, the General Assembly statements of 1974 (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1974, Part I, p. 584), 1978 (*Minutes*, PCUS, 1978, Part I, p. 39; *Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1978, Part I, p. 276), 1982 (*Minutes*, PCUS, 1982, Part I, p. 93), 2002 (*Minutes*, 2002, Part I, p. 732, Item 1.b.), and 2003 (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, pp. 635–37, Item B.).

^{61.} See, for example, the General Assembly statements of 1978 (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1978, Part I, p. 276; *Minutes*, PCUS, 1978, Part I, p. 39), 1987 (*Minutes*, PCUSA, 1987, Part I, p. 870), 1995 (*Minutes*, 1995, Part I, pp. 688–89), 2002 (*Minutes*, 2002, Part I, p. 732, Item 1.c.), and 2003 (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, pp. 635–37, Item B.1.).

^{62.} See, for example, the General Assembly statements of 1978 (*Minutes*, PCUS, 1978, Part I, pp. 79, 190), 1997 (*Minutes*, PCUSA, 1997, Part I, pp. 560–84), 2001 (*Minutes*, 2001, Part I, pp. 54–55), 2002 (*Minutes*, 2002, Part I, p. 732, Item 1.a.), and 2003 (*Minutes*, 2003, Part I, pp. 635–37, Item B.2. and C.).

- ^{63.} See, for example, the General Assembly statements of 1974 (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1974, Part I, p. 584), 1995 (*Minutes*, 1995, Part I, pp. 688–89), 1998 (*Minutes*, 1998, Part I, pp. 655–56), 2000 (*Minutes*, 2000, Part I, p. 498), and 2002 (*Minutes*, 2002, Part I, p. 733, Item 1.f.).
- ^{64.} For the text, see www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/christians-jews.pdf.
- ^{65.} See p. 17 of 40 in the pdf file (p. 13 of the paper).
- ^{66.} See pp. 18–19 of 40 in the pdf file (pp. 14–15 of the paper).
- ^{67.} See the final draft of “Christians and Jews: People of God.”
- ^{68.} P. 19 of 40 in the pdf file (p. 15 of the paper).
- ^{69.} See also 2 Cor. 5:14–15; 1 Tim. 4:6.
- ^{70.} Intriguingly, several ancient witnesses to the text of John 12:32, quoted just above, reflect the same “cosmic” theology found here in Colossians, reading *panta* (all things) rather than *pantas* (all people).
- ^{71.} “The Second Letter to the Corinthians,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. XI (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), p. 98.
- ^{72.} Within those congregations that follow the Revised Common Lectionary strictly, neither ch. 27 nor ch. 33 is ever read or preached on during worship. In fact only one passage about Jacob and Esau (their birth and Esau’s lost birthright) and three other episodes from the life of Jacob (his dream of the heavenly ladder at Bethel, his marriage to Leah and Rachel, and his wrestling with the “man” at Peniel), are ever read. For this reason, the story of these twins is summarized rather fully in the following paragraphs.
- ^{73.} This parable is well known to Presbyterians. In churches following the Revised Common Lectionary it was just read on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 14, 2010, along with 2 Cor. 5:16–21 (see above, at fn. 68)! Still, the interpretation of the parable offered here may not be familiar to many.
- ^{74.} This committee represents a considerable diversity in life experiences, theological perspectives, and views of current reality in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. This will become obvious through reading the four individual vignettes that have been written by committee members and are included in this section of the report. It has been encouraging to see how the committee has worked to respect the struggles, pains, experiences, and opinions of each of its members. We have worked hard to find consensus of opinion as we have proceeded with each section of this report and with our recommendations. As one can imagine given the complexity of the situation, this has not always been possible.
- ^{75.} The Middle East Study Committee (MESC) met four times: April 1–3 (Washington, D.C.), August 17–September 1 (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Palestine), November 11–13 (New York City), January 29–30 (Louisville, Ky.). A complete list of all the individuals with whom the committee met is available in Appendix 1. Great care was taken to assure that equal voice was given to all viewpoints.
- ^{76.} The results of that survey are included in Appendix 3.
- ^{77.} The MESC was not able to gain access to Gaza due to the recent war and blockade, under which Israeli forces have prevented most church representatives from entering that territory; and therefore we did not have the opportunity to hear the voice of Hamas. Our time limitations did not permit us to have

conversations with members of the Likud in Israel or Hezbollah in Lebanon. From the time of the appointment of this committee in February 2009 until the submission of this report on March 5, 2010, the committee has attempted to make the best use of the limited time and resources that we have been provided.

78. Avraham Burg, *The Holocaust Is Over; We Must Rise From Its Ashes* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5.

79. Abunimah, Ali, *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006),

80. Burg, 8.

81. Burg, 9.

82. This is not the case with Avraham Burg and a growing number of American and Israeli Jews.

83. Sabeel is an ecumenical theological center in Jerusalem, which work for the liberation of Palestinians.

84. Ateek, Naim Stifan, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 3.

85. This is not the case with Naim Ateek or with Nahida Gordon, whose vignette follows.

86. Steven R. Feldman, *Compartments: How the Brightest, Best Trained, and Most Caring People can Make Judgments That are Completely and Utterly Wrong* (Xlibris, 2009), 10.

87. Feldman, 132.

88. Feldman, 147.

89. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Christian Presence in Israel and Palestine, Resource Sheet 5 of 27: Developed February 2005, updated March 2006, www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources.htm.

90. Christians in the Middle East, BBC News, Last Updated: Thursday, 15 December 2005. Can be accessed at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4499668.stm. Data sources were: World Christian Database, *Al-Nahar* (a major Lebanese national daily newspaper), the Government of Israel, U.S. State Department reports on religious freedom; CIA World Factbook, the UN special representative for Iran; UNDP, the World Bank, Egyptian government, the Palestinian Authority, the Government of Jordan, and the Government of Iran.

91. Collins, Rania Al Qass; Rifat Odeh Kassis; and Mitri Raheb, Editors, *Palestinian Christians: Facts, Figures and Trends 2008* (Bethlehem, Palestine: Diyar Consortium, 2008), 6.

92. Soudah' Romell. *Christians in the Holy Land: Across the Political and Economic Divide. The Sabeel Survey on Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Israel*, 2006.

93. Khoury, Samia. Member of the board of Sabeel. Personal communication.

94. Feldman, 161.
95. <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/PressReleases/2010/prn201002.html>
96. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/19/world/middleeast/19iran.html>
97. The Federation of American Scientist estimates the number less than 100 (<http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/israel/nuke/>). The Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control reports that Israel is currently the sixth most powerful nuclear state, with a stockpile of over 100 nuclear weapons (<http://www.wisconsinproject.org/countries/israel/nuke.html>).
98. From September 29, 2000, to December 26, 2008, 4,860 Palestinians were killed (Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Israel) by occupation forces and 47 by Israeli civilians for a total of 4,907. (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs web site: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/>) We know that violence takes various forms, overt and then more structural, and these figures only portray the overt violence.
99. According to records from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the first recorded suicide bombing occurred in April 6, 1994. Total deaths recorded due to suicide bombings in Israel for the years 2000 to 2008 are listed as 553 from a total of 147 attacks. (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs web site: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/>). According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Israel at the end of 2008 was composed of 1,487,600 ethnic Palestinians (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstracts of Israel 2009 No. 60, Table 2.1) and there have been 147 suicide bombers, thus .0098 percent of Palestinians resort to this extreme violence.
100. B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 2008 Annual Report: Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 15. Can be accessed at http://www.btselem.org/download/200712_annual_report_eng.pdf.
101. UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Occupied Palestinian Territory, The Humanitarian Impact on Palestinians of Israeli Settlements and other Infrastructure in the West Bank, 48.
102. Israeli Committee Against House Demolition. See <http://www.icahd.org/eng/docs/ICAHD's%20updated%20House%20demolition%20statistics.pdf>.
103. Ibid, <http://www.icahd.org/eng/docs/Cast%20Lead%20demolitions.pdf>.
104. Ibid.
105. For example, the Middle East Council of Churches through its Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) continues to bear a strong and necessary Christian witness and to resist the occupation and the siege of the Gaza Strip by providing educational and vocational training and health services in Gaza. A detailed description of this work can be found in the DSPR–Gaza Area *Annual Report 2009*, see <http://www.neccgaza.org/>.
106. “The Amman Call” can be found in Appendix 3.
107. In August 2009, the Middle East Study Committee was invited to participate in part of a PIEF week of study in Bethlehem at the Dar Annadwa Conference Center.
108. “Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth” can be found in Appendix 5.

¹⁰⁹. Feldman, 163.

¹¹⁰. Burg, xiv.

PART TWO: RECOMMENDATIONS

The 219th General Assembly (2010) approved 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.

2. Affirmation of Previous General Assembly Policies & Statements¹

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. the 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.

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 (MESC). 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

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.

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.

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, and Egyptian collaboration in the enforcement of the blockade of Gaza.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

PART THREE: STUDY MATERIALS

[As cited in recommendation 8.b. above, this section will be collected and approved by the Monitoring Group as part of their responsibility.]

Appendixes

Appendix 1: List of Contacts Made by Middle East Study Committee

April 1–3, 2009—Washington, D.C.

Bill Somplatsky-Jarman, associate for Mission Responsibility Through Investment, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Archbishop Viken Aykazian, Armenian Orthodox Church; then-president of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

The Reverend Dr. Canon John Peterson, representative of the Bishop of Washington and the Bishop of Jerusalem, Episcopal Church

Dr. Noura Erakat, adjunct professor, International Human Rights Law in the Middle East, Georgetown University

Dr. Stephen M. Colecchi, director, Office of International Justice and Peace, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Attorney Mark Pelavin, associate director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Rueben Brigety, director of the Sustainable Security Program, Center for American Progress

Dr. Marc Braverman, clinical psychologist and author, executive director of the Holy Land Peace Project

HE Ambassador Thomas Goldberger, director, Office of Israel and Palestinian Affairs, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State

HE Ambassador Warren Clark, director, Churches for Middle East Peace

August 16–30, 2009—Travel Trip to Middle East

1. Lebanon

Dr. Joseph Jabbara, president, Lebanese American University, Beirut, Lebanon

Dr. Mary Mikheal, president, Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon

Dr. Paul Haidostian, president, Haigazian University, Beirut, Lebanon

HE. Metropolitan Mar Theophilos George Saliba, archbishop of Mount Lebanon, Syrian Orthodox Church

The Reverend George Mourad, moderator, National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon

The Reverend Fadi Dagher, general secretary, National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon

National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon Leadership (about twenty-five persons)

Guirgis Saleh, general secretary, The Middle East Council of Churches

The Reverend Dr. Habib Badr, presiding pastor, The National Evangelical Church of Beirut;
representative of Middle East Council of Churches Executive Committee

The Reverend Dr. Riad Jarjour, general secretary, Arab Group for Christian-Muslim Relations;
Participated in the Group's Monthly Meeting (Panel Presentations on the subject "The
Diminishing Christian Presence in the Middle East") Beirut, Lebanon

Representatives of the Iraqi Presbyterian Church

HE Metropolitan Elias Audeh, Archbishop, The Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East,
Beirut and Mount Lebanon

2. Syria

HE Archbishop Boulos Matar, archbishop of Beirut Maronite Bishopric, and president of the Catholic
Member Churches of the Middle East Council of Churches

His Beatitude Igantius IV Hazim, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All of the East,
Damascus, Syria

His Beatitude Gregorios III, Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Damascus, Syria

The Reverend Boutrus Zaour, pastor, and a leadership group of the Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church
of Damascus, Syria

Madame Colette Khoury, cultural advisor to President Bashar Al-Assad and author (also, a member
of the Evangelical Church, Damascus)

Presbyterian pastor and representative of the Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church of Iran

3. Jordan

His Excellency Senator Akel Biltaji, former minister of Tourism and Antiquities and special advisor
to His Majesty King Abdullah II, Amman

Wafa Goussous, director, the Middle East Council of Churches' Amman Liaison Office

Father Nabil Haddad, the Jordanian Interfaith Co-existence Research Center, Amman

The Reverend Fadi Diab, pastor, Redeemer Church in Amman, Jordan (The committee also
worshiped and engaged in a time of fellowship and conversation with the congregation.)

The Reverend Fa'eq Haddad, Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and Middle East, Amman

The Reverend Samer Azar, pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Good Shepherd Church, Amman, Jordan

4. Israel/Palestine

Dr. Mahdi Abdel Hadi, director of PASSIA (The Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of
International Affairs), Jerusalem

His Beatitude Fouad Twail, Patriarch, Latin (Roman Catholic) Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish, director, The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel

Rabbi Na'amah Kelman, dean, Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem

Rabbi Shelton Donnell, retired rabbi living in Jerusalem

Ophir Yarden, director, The Center for Interreligious Encounter with Israel, ICCI

Rabbi Navah Hefetz, director of Education, Rabbis for Human Rights

Stuart Schoffman, senior fellow, The Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem

Yael Stein, research director at B'Tselem (The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territory), Jerusalem

The Reverend Cannon Robert Edmunds, St. George the Martyr Episcopal Cathedral Church, Jerusalem. (The Committee also worshiped with the congregation of St. George's parish church.)

Judith Harel, Information and Advocacy Unit, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Territories, Jerusalem

Rabbi Edward Rettig, associate director for Legislative and Educational Affairs, The American Jewish Committee, Jerusalem

Daniel Rossing, director, The Jerusalem Center for Jewish Christian Relations

HE Avraham Burg, Former MK and Speaker of the Knesset and Cabinet Minister and author

David Wilder, spokesman, The Jewish Community (Israeli Settlement Association) of Hebron Christian Peacemaker Team, Hebron

The Reverend Mark Brown, regional representative, The Lutheran World Federation, Jerusalem

Dr. Tawfiq Nasser, chief executive officer, Augusta Victoria Hospital, Mt. of Olives, Jerusalem

The Reverend Ian Alexander, international coordinator, SABEEL Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Jerusalem

Nora Carmi, Cedar Duaybis, Samia Khoury, directors, SABEEL

Dar Annadwa's 5th Annual Conference: The Kairos and the Intersection of Theology and Politics, Bethlehem

Angela Godfrey-Goldstein, Israeli Committee Against Home Demolition, Jerusalem

November 11–13, 2009—New York

HE Ambassador Riyad Mansour, permanent observer of the Palestine Authority to the United Nations

HE Ambassador Daniel Carmon, deputy permanent representative of Israel to the United Nations

Chris Ferguson, representative to the United Nations from the World Council of Churches

Appendix 2: **General Assembly Policy Review**

A Continuing Witness for Middle East Peace with Current Application

Introduction:

This summary begins with a very brief historical review of the context for Presbyterian mission and relationships in the larger Middle East since 1856 and then concentrates on positions taken by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including its predecessor denominations, on Israel/Palestine and on the several wars that have occurred in the recent period (including the Iranian revolution, the first Gulf War, and the Iraq war begun in March 2003). Presbyterian-founded educational and medical institutions remain particularly notable in Cairo and Beirut but mission partnerships and ecumenical relations link us with 15 million Arab Christians throughout the region. Their presence, the importance of the “Holy Land” for our faith, the tragic frequency of violence, and enormous U.S. geostrategic investments in oil and Israel, have prompted frequent General Assembly attention, averaging a policy or shorter resolution every other year since 1967.

The General Assembly Social Witness Policy Compilation (available on the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) website: www.pcusa.org/acswp) includes excerpts from most of social policy statements of the General Assembly. The latest comprehensive statement on the Middle East dates from 1997; it shows great continuity with the statement of 1949 concerning Palestinian refugees and with the equally comprehensive policy statement of 1974. General Assembly statements generally consist of study or rationale sections (partly in appendices in this study) accompanied by recommendations for study, action, and witness. Copies of the 1997 statement may be downloaded free of charge from the ACSWP website. Similarly, resolutions on the Iraq war (2003, 2004, and 2008) and “Violence, Religion, and Terrorism” (2004) are available in both print and cyber form and in several issues of *Church & Society* magazine (2003, 2004, 2006). In shortest summary, this policy stream consistently finds the Israeli occupation of Palestine to be at or near the heart of too many regional conflicts, although the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq has created both new refugees and new forms of ideological response.

Context and History of Mission

Although the Orthodox Churches of the Middle East (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Assyrian, and Byzantine [also known as Greek]), and Catholic churches (Coptic, Maronite, Melkite, Greek, and Latin Rite [Roman]) maintain continuity with the earliest Christian communities and have generally lived under Islamic governments since the early Islamic conquests of the late 600s and early 700s, any treatment of the Middle East must note the history of the Crusades and the fall of Constantinople, now Istanbul, the removal of Islam from most of Europe by 1492, and then the relatively brief European colonial history that followed the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after Turkey’s defeat in WWI. The Protestant denominations entered the Middle East in the 19th century, with each denomination taking particular areas. The Presbyterians (with the Congregationalists) began work in Syria and Lebanon in the early mid 1820s, in Iran in the mid 1830s, in Iraq (jointly with the Reformed and Congregational Churches) in the mid 1840s, and in Egypt in the mid 1850s. The Anglicans (Church of England), as well as the Lutherans (i.e., the “German Mission” consisting of the German Lutheran “state church” and the German “Free Church,” i.e., Reformed) focused their mission activity in Jerusalem, Jordan, and the Holy Land. The post-WWII period was marked by the independence (decolonization) of a variety of Middle Eastern countries (some with relatively recent boundaries), the rise of the oil states generally, and through Saudi Arabia particularly, the influence of a very conservative Wahabist strain of Islam. Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic movements have had some influence in the post-war period, but nationalism has been the prevailing model, with Islam providing a counterweight to Western cultural (if not economic) influence.

Overview of Positions on Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace Efforts

From 1948 forward, recognition of Israel has been accompanied by concern for the original refugees (about 750,000) displaced during the 1947–49 period. Statements note the role of Egypt and Jordan in controlling Gaza and the West Bank, respectively, until 1967. Historical summaries are found in the 1974 and 1997 church background reports. These note the 1956 Suez-Sinai war between Egypt and

Britain and France, joined by an Israeli attack across Sinai and slow withdrawal. The Eisenhower administration effectively backed Egypt's right to control the Suez canal, but Cold War and other developments led to Egypt and other Arab states aligning themselves more or less with the Soviet Union, while Israel's ties with the U.S. became closer and included U.S. acceptance of Israel's nuclear weapons development.

The major 1974 United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA) statement was begun at the General Assembly's request in 1971 and speaks consistently of the "Palestinians," whose organizations were being developed in the 1964–65 period. The 1974 report summarizes the political-military situation in Israel/Palestine as follows:

In the 1967 war, Israel occupied positions in the Golan area of Syria, the whole of Sinai with its strategic position on the Suez Canal and at Sharm-el-Sheik, all of Jerusalem, and the West Bank of the Jordan. In 1970, Egypt, Jordan and Israel accepted the provisions of United Nations Resolution 242, adopted in November of 1967, which called for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territory and Arab recognition of Israel and secure and recognized boundaries, but differing interpretations of these provisions and the means to implement them led to continual impasse the stage was set for the October, 1973, fighting. (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1974, Part I, p. 15)

The 1974 recommendations include "criteria" for "the evaluation of any proposed settlement," as well as encouragement for study, interfaith dialogue, advocacy, and ecumenical coordination. The presupposition was that the occupation should end in accordance with international law, even though the pattern of Israel's resisting any United Nations involvement, except to care for refugees, was already visible.

The later 1970s were marked by the achievement of Camp David agreement in 1980 by Jimmy Carter, Menachem Begin, and Anwar Sadat, but no substantial progress followed. Thus the 1995 statement sums up many resolutions in this excerpt:

The 207th General Assembly (1995)

1. Reaffirm[s] actions of previous General Assemblies (1974, 1984, 1988, 1990) supporting the status of Jerusalem. [A shared status, reflecting the "international city" status recommended by the UN—ed.]
2. Reaffirm[s the] actions of previous General Assemblies (1974, 1977, 1983, 1984, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991) acknowledging the right of Israel to exist within secure, internationally recognized borders and the right of the Palestinians to self-determination.
3. Urges the president and the United States Congress to:
 - a. support the United Nations in the implementation of its resolutions on the future of Jerusalem;
 - b. renew efforts to make U.S. aid to Israel conditional upon the cessation of the appropriation of Palestinian land in and around Jerusalem and the establishment of new settlements in the occupied territories, especially those that are a part of the ongoing efforts to create a Greater Jerusalem.

At that time, a new peace process had started in 1993 following the First Intifada (1987 forward) that, notwithstanding its non-violent origins, had been met with massive arrests, long term detentions, and deportations, leading to further violence. Here the pattern of disproportionately more Palestinian than Israeli civilian deaths is marked.

The 1997 PC(USA) policy continues the presumption that a two-state solution can be negotiated with the role of the U.S. as “honest broker,” although there is less faith about the role of the U.S.

Recommendations include:

Call upon the United States to take effective measures, including withholding aid and joining in efforts of the United Nations Security Council, to oppose expansion of Israeli settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, and in the Jerusalem area, where unilateral action, without negotiations, exacerbates national and religious tensions, and runs the risk of generating violent confrontation. (*Minutes*, 1997, Part I, p. 14)

Unilateral Israeli settlement expansion continued and great violence continued in a Second Intifada partly triggered by Ariel Sharon’s provocative visit to the Dome of the Rock, following the failure of both the Oslo Accords and President Clinton’s attempt at a new Camp David agreement. The 2004 resolutions of the PC(USA) against the “security barrier” or “wall” and for “selective divestment” followed recognition of the role of continuing Israeli expansion and collective punishments of Palestinian people, including overwhelming military responses to sometimes terrorist acts of Palestinian resistance, coupled with passivity on the part of the Bush Administration, passivity that continued through Israel’s war on Lebanon in the summer of 2006 (after the General Assembly).

The 204th General Assembly (2006) rephrased and broadened the focus of PC(USA) corporate responsibility efforts, clarifying that “divestment” of stock in companies collaborating in the occupation would be the culmination of an explicit process of dialogue and shareholder proposals. Disagreement with “Christian Zionism” by the General Assembly remained in place, as did a call for justice for the Palestinian people and particular concern for Christians being squeezed out by the occupation. The 204th General Assembly (2006) almost supported the campaign to condemn suicide bombings sponsored most notably by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, but generalized the concern to include all innocents subject to bombing and effective terror. It should be noted that the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns spoke out against the war in Lebanon, and that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) provided relief supplies afterward to Muslims and Christians alike. Many Christian churches, including several Presbyterian churches, as well as mosques and thousands of homes and fields were destroyed in the very widespread Israeli shelling. The survival of the Shiite Hezbollah forces was seen by them as a triumph, reinforcing religiously motivated Islamic parties throughout the region and leaving the government of Lebanon increasingly weak.

Particular Positions, Primarily as Expressed in the 1997 Middle East Policy

1. Concerning Political Violence

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognizes, “the legitimate right of the state to defend itself and the right of oppressed peoples to resistance and revolution” (*Resolution on the Middle East*, pp. 38–39). While the church recognizes these rights it also consistently called for cessation of violence. The admitted tension in these views is explored in a 1999 resolution that looks at the dilemmas of military intervention for humanitarian purposes and the development of “Just Peacemaking” rather than simply “Just War” criteria for primarily nonmilitary engagement (see Iraq War below). Complex political dynamics are present in the Middle East. Different factions of people within each nation support political violence and sometimes religious and ethnic cleansing. Governance (including in tribal and colonial times) has traditionally not been democratic; several states explicitly favor state religions and many discriminate. Thus struggles present within and among faith traditions aggravate an already volatile context.

2. Concerning Stereotypes

We recognize our biases and fears regarding our American understanding of the Middle East. Two dominant perspectives exist: one fearful of Islam through the portrayal of Islamic Fundamentalism,

the other involving the “stereotyping of Arabs as shifty, sinister, and terrorist, reflecting ongoing patterns of racism in American life” (*Resolution on the Middle East*, p. 38) At an emotional level, unhelpful rhetoric, labels, and other designations justify denials of human rights and the use of violence rather than negotiation. This is part of the church’s rationale for encouraging the U.S. government to support serious negotiation and open communication that may lead to peace (*Resolution on the Middle East*, p. 40). The church’s repeated condemnation of anti-Semitism can also be considered an opposition to anti-Jewish stereotypes.

3. Concerning Terrorism

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has consistently opposed terrorism by all entities and by all means. The “Resolution on Violence, Religion, and Terrorism”(2004) quotes the Federal Bureau of Investigation definition of terrorism as, “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social goals” (FBI Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, *Terrorism in the United States: 1990*, Washington, D.C.:U.S. Department of Justice, 1991, p. 25). This operational definition includes the motivation of the groups involved, attempting to make the classification of who or what constitutes terrorism less dependent upon one’s own perspective and more on its impacts. Without equating coercive (and surveillance-monitored) situations with violent action itself, the paper addresses the legitimacy of official uses of force. It finds unilateral uses of force to be morally destabilizing. The resolution cautions against overreacting to the fear created by terrorism, advises on understanding and if possible removing its causes, advocates treating it as a form of crime when possible, and warns against possible misuses of the broad surveillance features of the U.S.A. Patriot Act of 2001.

Concerning Arms Control

Many governments, and in particular the United States, export weapons to countries in the region in order to support military efforts and existing regimes; others smuggle weapons to resist or change groups in power. The church has opposed the flood of weapons that weaken democracies and the development of new military and security technologies that imprison populations.

The actions of the 209th General Assembly (1997) stand clearly for the de-escalation of the arms race and call for further moderation, urging Congress to enact a Code of Conduct to govern the arms exports of the United States. We have called upon all Middle Eastern countries to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and other treaties (FBI Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, *Terrorism in the United States: 1990*, Washington, D.C.:U.S. Department of Justice, 1991, p. 44). In the wake of claims about nonexistent “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq, repeated but disputed claims of nuclear weaponization by Iran, and the dangers of nuclear weapons in India and Pakistan, the church has stood by its pro-monitoring and comprehensive treaty positions.

4. Concerning Economic Issues

With much of the economy of the Middle East based upon the production and exportation of oil, there is great concern for the future sustainability of all nations in the region. Further, much of the land has been scarred by the impact of war and continuing strife. The economic burdens of war and costs of occupation are both unsustainable and unjust. The General Assembly urges all nations to assist in developing more sustainable, self-reliant, and socially equitable agricultural systems. We also encourage governments to support economic development by supporting non-petroleum trade with Middle Eastern countries, and call for a more equitable redistribution of U.S. aid funds that presently go mainly to Israel (\$3 billion plus) and Egypt (\$1 billion, based on the Camp David accord). Where

the United States and other governments have compromised the infrastructure of countries in the region, especially in Iraq, the church calls for serious reconstruction and re-development (*Iraq: Our Responsibility and the Future*, approved by the 217th General Assembly [2006], pp. 9–10). The General Assembly has also urged caution in the use of economic sanctions to protect the least privileged even when such sanctions have international approval (*Resolution on the Middle East*, p. 52).

5. Concerning Water

Water is in precious, short supply for many in the Middle East. Wars and disputes have been waged over the control of water rights in order to provide growing populations with potable drinking sources and irrigation. The General Assembly has supported both equitable distribution and new technologies to create more sources of fresh water and food self-sufficiency (*Resolution on the Middle East*, pp. 57–58).

6. Concerning Petroleum, Energy, and the Environment

Given massive U.S. dependence on foreign oil, it has been hard to separate security needs from military commitments to “protect our way of life” (*Resolution on the Middle East*, p. 62). The PC(USA) has sought to distinguish our commitments to freedom and democracy from our oil-dependent and carbon-producing transportation, housing, and food production habits. The 1997 Middle East policy included the call to “reduce significantly the American demand for petroleum so as to conserve this nonrenewable resource, protect the environment, reduce balance of payments pressures, and lower energy costs for developing countries” (*Resolution on the Middle East*, p. 64), and thus reduce the need for military presence in the region. While the Iraq war reversed this direction, it was reinforced in the 218th General Assembly (2008) resolution on energy, *The Power To Change*. Along with consumption patterns, the PC(USA) has long been concerned for wise population control in the Middle East and other regions, noting these while calling upon “the United Nations and its member states to exercise their influence in . . . assisting Middle Eastern countries in their efforts to protect and preserve the environment” (*Resolution on the Middle East*, p. 69).

Recent Israeli-Palestinian and related developments

1. The Occupation, the Wall, and Questions about the “Two-State” Solution

The “two-state” solution remains the official international position of most nations, including Israel, the United States, and, at least implicitly, the main Palestinian parties and most Arab states. However, the scope of Israeli settler presence, the scale of the “security barrier” or Wall that largely follows their presence, and the network of roads almost exclusively for Jewish Israeli use, all call the Two-State solution into question. These matters, discussed extensively at the 2004, 2006, and 2008 General Assemblies, led the 218th General Assembly (2008) to authorize a new study of the Middle East with a focus on the Israel-Palestine struggle.

The economic and humanitarian stranglehold on Gaza, following the withdrawal of settlements, efforts to pressure the Hamas government, and finally a disproportionately devastating bombing and invasion in late December of 2008 and early 2009, has only made the two-state solution more remote. Yet, as it stands today (2009), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) supports an economically and environmentally viable and contiguous Palestine existing peacefully next to an Israel that has internationally-recognized borders. The PC(USA) has been clear in its condemnation of terrorism and its concern for an end for violent attacks of Palestinians on Israelis and vice versa. Rather than focusing on ethnic and religious hatreds, however, the church has understood Israel’s fundamental security problem to be based in the injustice of the occupation of Palestinian land by now more than 450,000 settlers.

2. Christian Population Decline, Muslim Dialogue, and U.S. Re-engagement

Three other elements affect the current mission and witness of the church: the continued pressure on and at least relative decline of the Christian population in Israel/Palestine and elsewhere, the desire of moderate Muslim leaders across the region (and world) to develop an expanded conversation with Christian leaders (as seen in the public statement, “A Common Word”), and the tentative U.S. re-engagement with an Israeli-Palestinian peace process, due in part to international pressure on both the U.S. and Israel. The human rights and humanitarian law implications of the Gaza invasion (detailed in the Goldstone Report) continue to be debated even as a new U.S. administration commits millions of dollars to rebuild structures largely destroyed by U.S.-provided weapons. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) carries on a range of dialogues with Jewish and Muslim groups, trying to hear both perspectives, and is also conducting a study of Muslim-Christian relations similar to an earlier study of Jewish-Christian relations.

3. Public Witness and Corporate Engagement, Including Divestment of Securities

Along with other forms of public witness, since the early 1970s the PC(USA) has sought to “put its money where its mouth is,” both in positive investment (such as Self-Development of People and OikouCredit) and by using the influence of its foundation and pension investments in companies. The push for corporate social responsibility generally has been very influenced by the churches; it is also controversial for the association of campaigns against South African apartheid—which included divestment—with the use of economic pressure on Israeli occupation and land annexation policies, or continuing violence by Israelis and Palestinians against innocent civilians. The 216th General Assembly (2004) stated that continued Israeli occupation and expansion of settlements required the church to examine which of its investments supported and profited from that occupation and hence posed questions of moral integrity for the church. The 216th General Assembly (2004) action also stated that “selective, phased” divestment (that is, aimed at companies supporting the occupation, not Israeli companies in general) should be a form of witness in a worsening situation. [The 2004 phrasing was the same language that had been used in 1985 for the South Africa policy: See Endnote].

The 217th General Assembly (2006) clarified that divestment was always part of a larger effort of dialogue and engagement with companies, but did not disavow corporate engagement, which continues through the work of the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI). The 217th General Assembly (2006) restated its commitment that “... financial investments of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as they pertain to Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank, be invested in only peaceful pursuits, and affirm that the customary corporate engagement process of the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment ... is the proper vehicle for achieving this goal” (*Minutes*, 2006, Part I, p. 944).

Many but not all Jewish groups oppose any corporate pressure on Israeli policies. Conversely, most Palestinian groups, both Christian and Muslim, support such nonviolent pressure, as in “A Moment of Truth,” December 11, 2009, statement by Palestinian Christians: Section 4-2-6 “*Palestinian civil organizations, as well as international organizations, NGO’s and certain religious institutions call upon individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance ...*”

Alongside concerns for the unity of the church and for friendship with the Jewish community, the basic issue is the right of the church to make its own moral decisions about what it will profit from or invest in. This was clearly stated by the 218th General Assembly (2008)’s invocation of the Barmen Declaration in its combined action on the Atlanta and other Middle East overtures. Barmen and other

confessions make it quite clear that the church has every right and a basic responsibility under God to witness against any country, company, or policy that deprives God's children of justice. Of several overtures seeking to limit the assembly's voice to general statements deploring violence, one was affirmed that cautioned against "over-identification" with any party to conflicts. At the same time, in also affirming the Amman Call, one may judge the assembly to have identified itself with the ecumenical Christian community.

4. The Impacts of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Iranian Developments

The 218th General Assembly (2008) "commended for study" a paper on the Iraq war entitled, *To Repent, To Restore, To Rebuild, and To Reconcile*. Attached to an overture clearly calling for responsible and timely withdrawal of U.S. and remaining "coalition" forces, the assembly recognized the need for massive reconstruction and the moral responsibility of the United States for thousands of Iraqi and U.S. deaths. Those actions also recognized the crisis caused by more than 4.5 million displaced Iraqis, 2 million internally and 2.5 million in Jordan, Syria, and other neighboring countries. Throughout the six years of this conflict, Arab TV and public commentary has compared the U.S. invasion and presence in Iraq to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In some quarters, such linkage has fueled the appeal of terrorism and mixtures of anti-American and anti-Israel feeling.

Perhaps most clearly in the "Baker-Hamilton" Report, the U.S. government began to recognize the detrimental role played by the continued "impasse" between Israel and Palestine on other countries and popular attitudes within the region. Within the larger Middle East, the clear desire of many in Israel for an Israeli or U.S. attack on Iran has reinforced continued hostility to both countries in some quarters. The larger sets of issues raised by "preventive" or, conceivably in the Sudan, by humanitarian intervention, were addressed in the 1998 General Assembly policy on "Just Peacemaking," a phrase that has also been used in ecumenical circles for a set of war prevention and conflict resolution approaches.

As the U.S. returns its focus to the war in Afghanistan, attention focuses on the prosecution of the war, whose initial aims were widely supported: ending the Taliban support for Al Qaeda. The 217th General Assembly (2006) approved a "Resolution on Human Rights in a Time of Terrorism and Torture" critical of all weakening of Geneva Conventions, extraordinary rendition, and extraterritorial prison facilities. With the slow closure of the Guantanamo Bay indefinite prison facility, and clearer policies against torture, it is hoped that diplomatic and development initiatives will replace the primary use of military force. In terms of church policy, it will be important to encourage support for humanitarian reconstruction despite the increasingly clear financial havoc wrought by carrying on both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars as "emergency appropriations" rather than as part of the regular budget.

The General Assembly had in 2004 already determined that the invasion of Iraq was "unwise, immoral, and illegal," a viewpoint confirmed in the subsequent tragic disaster of the occupation and neglect of Afghanistan. The 2008 Iraq study paper notes how the exploitation of Shia and Sunni religious differences was underestimated, and how "terrorism" has become a blanket phrase for all kinds of non-state violence.

The 2009–10 Middle East Study Committee received a briefing on geostrategic issues and discussed these framework questions with representatives of several religious communities, as well as with State Department officials. As in previous policies, it noted the predominant presence of undemocratic governments—often supported and allied to the U.S. government and oil interests—and the social tensions building among young, relatively uneducated populations throughout the region. The Sunni elites in some of these governments themselves look with apprehension at any growth in Iran's power, although militant Islam throughout the region focuses on the trauma of Gaza and the

West Bank, much more visible on their televisions. This overall context becomes most important in assessing the actual threat posed by Iran's increasingly military-linked government, its links to Hezbollah and Hamas, and the results of previous preemptive military solutions.

Lebanon bears many scars from the military campaign carried out by Israel in the summer of 2006 that focused on Shiite areas in South Lebanon and Beirut but which also targeted many bridges and pieces of infrastructure serving all Lebanon. Hezbollah, while classified a "terrorist organization," demonstrates through its social services and governmental participation that it is a more broadly political body guided by an Islamist viewpoint of some flexibility. Iran's past support for Hezbollah is part of its appeal to Muslim Arab nonelites across the region who are willing to overlook its difference of sect and ethnicity (note: the dimensions of documented and alleged support for Hezbollah and Hamas by Iran, Syria, or other countries are subject to wide debate).

Lebanon's recent history has seen the withdrawal of overt Syrian presence, following the assassination of Rafik Hariri (allegedly by Syrian forces, though this remains unconfirmed). Following the election of Barack Obama and hopes of progress in the Middle East, Hezbollah's candidates were outvoted by more moderate parties, an outcome accepted peacefully. Lebanon's politics have, in fact, been long interfered in by powerful neighbors, with Israel invading in the 1980s and occupying Southern Lebanon—perhaps the largest factor in the development of Hezbollah in the first place. Syria's standing in the region has in fact grown since its overt withdrawal from Lebanon and it, like Lebanon and Jordan, remains stable and occupied with dealing with refugees from Iraq.

Iran and Hezbollah did not play a significant role in the threats to Israel made in the 1991 Gulf War and Israel's subsequent focus on Iraq related to Saddam Hussein's continuing in power. At the same time, since Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979, the U.S. government and Israel cooperated in a "dual containment" strategy—the "axis of evil" identified by the second Bush Administration reflected some of that background, despite several efforts by moderates in Iran to make positive overtures to the West—particularly after 9/11. Iran remembers U.S. support for both the CIA coup against democratically-elected Mohammed Mossadeq in 1956 (installing the Shah's dictatorship) and U.S. support for Saddam Hussein's 1980–81 war with Iran (including the then un-protested use of chemical weapons). All of this background of invasion and interference in the affairs of neighbors—in which the U.S. and Israel have been major players since long before the current Iraq war—needs to be kept in mind when assessing Iran's threat.

Iran's current leaders have repeatedly shown their disdain for both democracy and public protest, but they have also been under repeated threat of "regime change" by U.S. political leaders and preemptive military strike by Israel. Israel's stated willingness to bomb neighboring countries, as in the early 2009 case of a possible Syrian nuclear facility, may reinforce the Iran military's desire for a deterrent, as Iran itself has not invaded any other country for centuries.

Conclusion

The church remains attentive to conflicts in the Middle East and remains painfully aware of the number of lives that have been lost as those conflicts continue. The church is committed to continuing to study the issues and pray for lasting peace. We are called upon to join in this prayer and to work on building networks of support for lasting peace among both members of our churches and within our nation, including support for transnational efforts at peace-building. The General Assembly has also called upon Presbyterians to create and maintain interreligious dialogue among Christians, Muslims, and Jews within their communities and has opposed the oversimplifications of Christian Zionism and other one-sided efforts. The church stands for the even-handed application of international humanitarian law and human rights protections, including protections for all religious and ethnic minorities (such as Armenians historically or Kurds today [*Resolution on the Middle East*, pp. 70–

72]). Because there are various forms of violence and oppression, General Assembly policy has addressed religious and ethnic exclusivism, economic opportunities, ecological and especially water and energy issues, as well as formal peace processes and alternatives to military invasions and occupations.

This policy review and application were prepared by the Reverend Christian Iosso, Ph.D., coordinator of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, General Assembly Mission Council, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), serving as co-opted staff to the Middle East Study Committee.

ENDNOTE ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: The corporate engagement of the church in support of a just peace in Israel and Palestine clearly builds on a history—unknown to some—of Presbyterian “mission responsibility through investment” or MRTI going back to 1971. Notable in this is not only the “selective, phased divestment” related to South Africa and later Sudan, but the church’s “Military-Related Investment Guidelines,” adopted by the General Assembly in 1981. Reflecting the church’s commitment to the 1980 policy, “Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling,” these guidelines restrict the church from profiting from nuclear weapons producers and the largest and most war-dependent military contractors. There has also been corporate engagement with companies active in countries with repressive regimes in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, most notably the Sudan before this became an organized focus of divestment. (The church has traditionally also proscribed investments in alcohol, tobacco, and gambling: the “sin stocks.”)

In assessing any corporate engagement strategy, the 1984 General Assembly study, “The Divestment Strategy: Ethical and Institutional Context,” is an important analysis of trusteeship and Christian mission. The key factors of integrity (not unattainable purity), effectiveness (the full impact is not financial), and ecumenical solidarity were presented. A year later the assembly adopted its South Africa-related divestment policy. A 1991 review of the implementation of that policy found that the church had divested of securities in thirteen companies while joining in ecumenical efforts that influenced the legitimacy of investment in South Africa for many more companies. In terms of effectiveness, church-led, nonviolent economic pressure of all kinds, including divestment, had led to the departure of 214 of 324 U.S. corporations in South Africa in 1981, representing an equity decline from \$2.6 billion to \$714 million, a substantial move toward isolating South Africa economically. Also, the churches played a key role in persuading international banks to stop long-term lending and accelerate repayment of short-term loans. As is well-known, after liberation, figures such as Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Allan Boesak credited the churches with decisive impact, as did studies such as Robert K. Massie’s *Loosing the Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years* (Doubleday, 1998). That 1991 review, “*The Dividends of Hope: An Evaluation of Divestment for South Africa: An Investment in Hope*,” led to the General Assembly action to “affirm a continued policy of selective, phased divestment until the South African Council of Churches and other ecumenical partners determine that irreversible change in the dismantling of apartheid ... has occurred or is occurring” (*Minutes*, 1991, Part I, p. 727).

This endnote does not review or duplicate MRTI’s work in fulfilling General Assembly Middle East policies, nor analyze the public impacts of the church’s stands, though they were known to many persons with whom the Middle East Study Committee met. The committee authorized Presbyterian Panel questions reviewing points of Middle East policy and included investment-related questions that would illuminate the links between the church’s voice and its economic activity. A basic question in interpreting the assembly’s policies is not whether Presbyterian investments alone sustain the occupation, or are complicit in funding acts of violence against civilians, or how much the church’s influence might add to de-legitimizing the occupation, but whether its integrity and solidarity with Palestinians require limited its profit from that occupation.

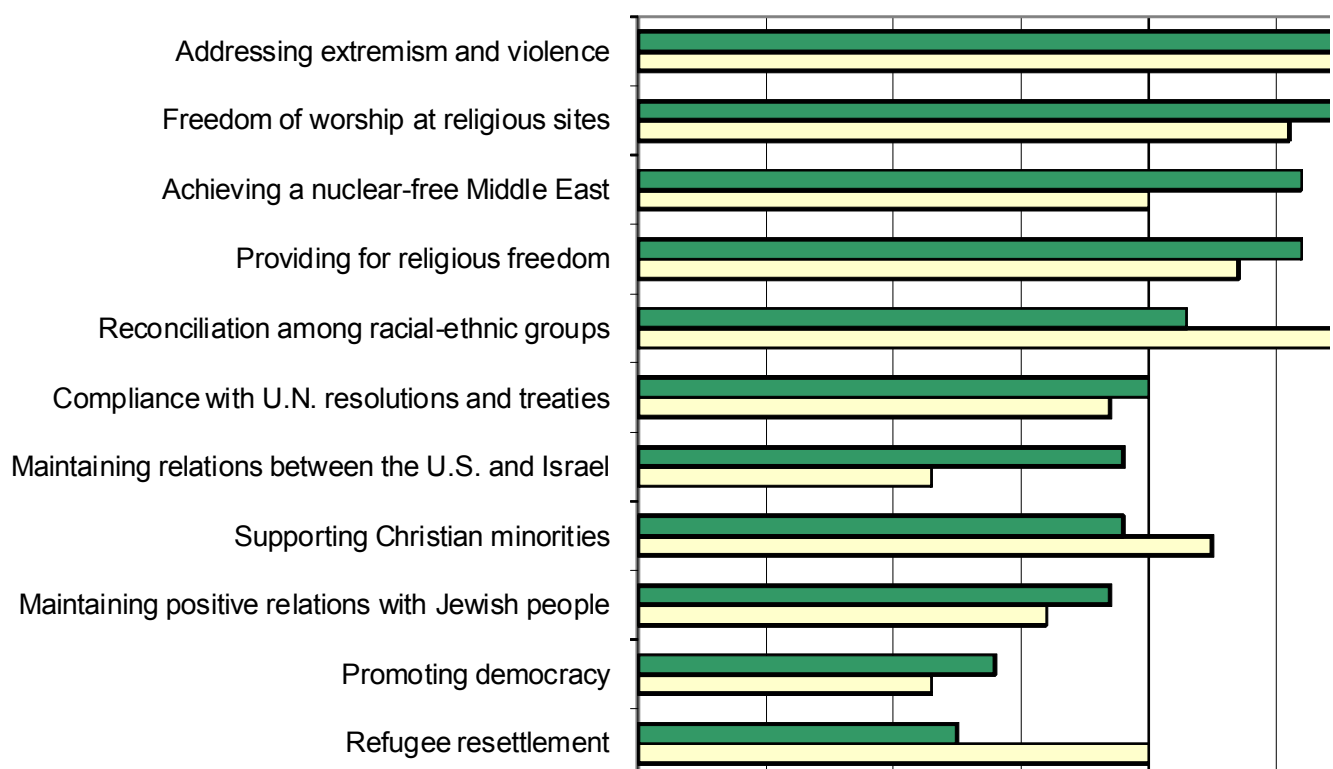
Appendix 3: Presbyterian Panel

ISRAEL/PALESTINE AND THE REST OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Priorities for Improving the Situation in the Middle East

- ✓ At least one-third of panelists in each group believe that pursuing the following actions is *very important* for improving the situation in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East:
 - Addressing extremism and the threat of violence (members, 72%; elders, 74%; pastors, 71%; specialized clergy, 70%).
 - Freedom of worship at all major religious sites (65%; 62%; 51%; 62%).
 - Achieving a nuclear-free Middle East (59%; 52%; 40%; 40%).
 - Providing for religious freedom throughout the Middle East (52%; 52%; 47%; 51%).
 - Reconciliation among racial-ethnic groups within Middle Eastern countries (45%; 43%; 57%; 57%).
 - Compliance with United Nations resolutions and human rights treaties (41%; 40%; 37%; 46%).
 - Supporting Christian minorities in Israel/Palestine (36%; 38%; 45%; 42%).
- ✓ More than one-third of laypeople—but fewer ministers—view as *very important* both maintaining positive relations between Presbyterians and members of the U.S. Jewish community (members, 40%; elders, 37%; pastors, 32%; specialized clergy, 27%) and maintaining the close diplomatic and military relationship between the U.S. and Israeli governments (38%; 38%; 23%; 22%).
- ✓ Two other principles are seen as *very important* by at least two in five ministers, but by fewer laypeople: reducing economic inequality within Middle Eastern countries (members, 25%; elders, 24%; pastors, 42%; specialized clergy, 48%) and refugee resettlement (26%; 25%; 40%; 47%).
- ✓ Relatively few panelists (members, 27%; elders, 28%; pastors, 23%; specialized clergy, 19%) believe that promoting democracy throughout the Middle East is *very important* (see also Figure 1).

Figure 1. Importance of Various Actions for Improving the Situation in Israel/Palestine and the Rest of the Middle East

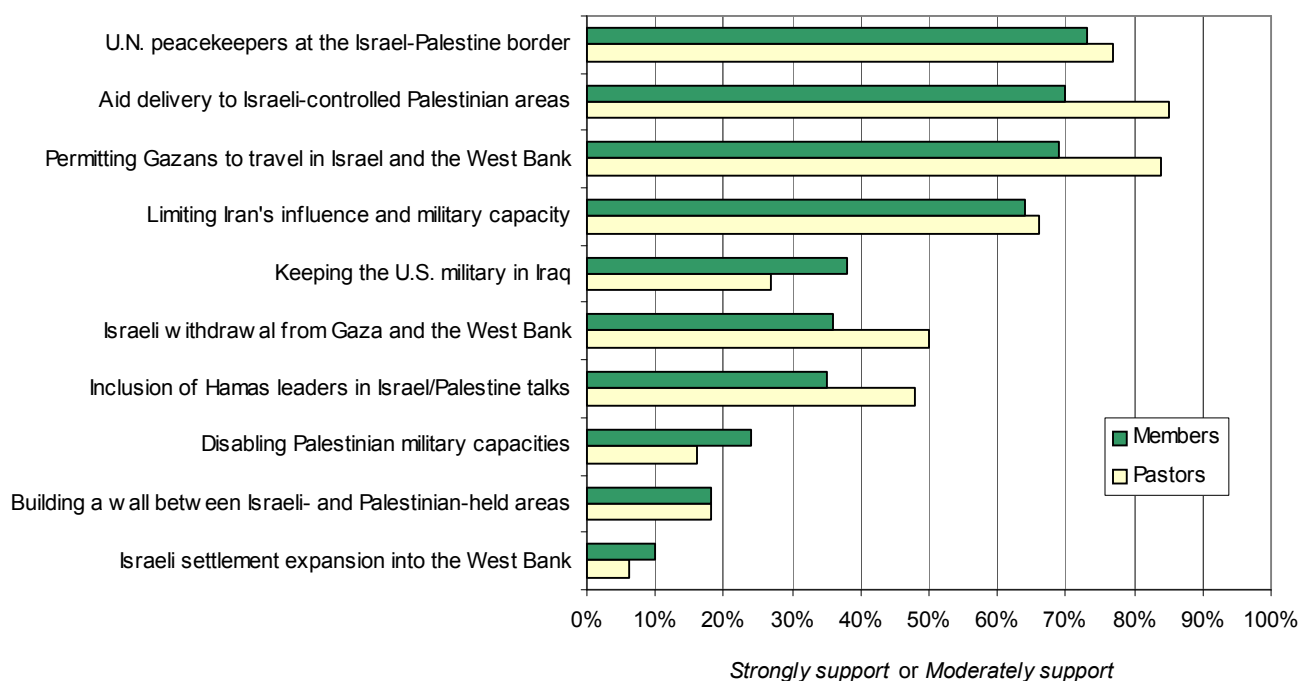


ISRAEL/PALESTINE AND THE REST OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Possible Peacemaking Strategies

- ✓ Large majorities of panelists in each group *strongly support* or *moderately support* the following peacemaking strategies:
 - Permitting Gaza residents to enter the West Bank and Israel for trade or other legitimate purposes (members, 69%; elders, 72%; pastors, 84%; specialized clergy, 87%).
 - Delivery by international organizations of humanitarian aid to people living in Palestinian territory occupied or controlled by Israel (70%; 68%; 85%; 90%).
 - The presence of United Nations peacekeepers to help supervise the borders between Israel and Palestine (73%; 70%; 77%; 85%).
 - Limiting the influence and military capacity of the Iranian government (64%; 66%; 66%; 60%).
- ✓ Almost half or more of ministers—but fewer members and elders—*strongly support* or *moderately support*:
 - Permanent Israeli withdrawal from all of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem (members, 36%; elders, 33%; pastors, 50%; specialized clergy, 61%).
 - The inclusion of democratically elected Hamas leaders in negotiations about the future of Israel/Palestine (35%; 41%; 48%; 61%).
- ✓ Around two in five members (38%) and elders (43%)—but fewer ministers (pastors, 27%)—*strongly support* or *moderately support* maintaining a U.S. military presence in Iraq.
- ✓ Few panelists in each group *strongly support* or *moderately support*:
 - Construction of a separation barrier between territory that the Israeli government administers and the Palestinian authorities administer (members, 18%; elders, 24%; pastors, 18%; specialized clergy, 17%).
 - Expansion of Israeli settlements further into the West Bank and East Jerusalem on Palestinian land (10%; 10%; 6%; 5%). (Figure 2 provides additional information.)

Figure 2. Support for Various Peacemaking Strategies in the Middle East



ISRAEL/PALESTINE AND THE REST OF THE MIDDLE EAST

A Two-State Solution?

- ✓ Seven in eight specialized clergy (86%), four in five pastors (78%), and two-thirds of members (65%) and elders (68%) support a two-state solution in the Middle East, with both a state of Israel and a state of Palestine.
- ✓ Three in ten members (30%) and one-quarter of elders (24%)—but fewer ministers (pastors, 15%; specialized clergy, 11%)—don't know whether or not they support this solution.

Comparing Responses of 2009 Panelists with Those of Earlier Panelists

Presbyterians' opinions about issues related to Israel/Palestine and the Middle East have been relatively stable, results of the August 2009 Panel survey and earlier surveys suggest.

The May 2002 Panel survey on Peacemaking, International Conflict, and Related Issues and the August 2009 survey asked virtually identical questions about support for a two-state solution in the Middle East, with both a state of Israel and a state of Palestine.

The November 2004 Panel survey on Current Issues in Church and Society and the August 2009 survey asked somewhat similar questions about support for the building of a wall between Israeli- and Palestinian-held areas.

The 2004 survey asked panelists whether they *favor*, *oppose*, or have *no opinion* about the “current construction by Israel of a security barrier or wall between it and occupied Palestinian territories.” The 2009 survey asked panelists whether they *strongly support*, *moderately support*, *neither support nor oppose*, *moderately oppose*, *strongly oppose*, or have *no opinion* about the “construction of a separation barrier between territory that the Israeli government administers and the Palestinian authorities administer.”

The levels of support for a two-state solution and building a wall have not changed over time with two exceptions. Members' support for building a wall declined over time, and specialized clergy's support for a two-state solution declined. (Table 1 provides additional information.)

Table 1
Support for a Two-State Solution and for Building a Wall

	% Favor a Two-State Solution		% Support the Building of a Wall	
	2002	2009	2004	2009
Members	71%	65%	30%	18%†
Elders	72%	68%	29%	24%
Pastors.....	82%	78%	22%	18%
Specialized Clergy	92%	86%†	17%	17%

† statistically significant difference ($p < .001$)

ISRAEL/PALESTINE AND THE REST OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Support for Israeli Withdrawal Among Presbyterians with Different Theological and Political Leanings

Presbyterians with different theological orientations and those linked with different political parties have very different opinions about permanent Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

Table 2 shows that larger fractions of panelists in each group who are theologically *liberal* or *very liberal* than are theologically *moderate* *strongly support* or *moderately support* Israeli withdrawal, and more theologically *moderate* panelists support withdrawal than *very conservative* or *conservative* panelists. This is also the case among panelists who have different political preferences. More Democrats than Independents support withdrawal, and more Independents than Republicans support withdrawal.

Table 2
Support for Israeli Withdrawal from Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, by Theological Orientation and by Political Party

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
Theological orientation †				
Very conservative or conservative.....	20%	16%	26%	34%
Moderate.....	29%	37%	50%	52%
Liberal or very liberal.....	62%	61%	72%	76%
Political party †				
Democratic.....	54%	49%	68%	69%
Independent.....	38%	41%	43%	62%
Republican.....	22%	22%	22%	25%

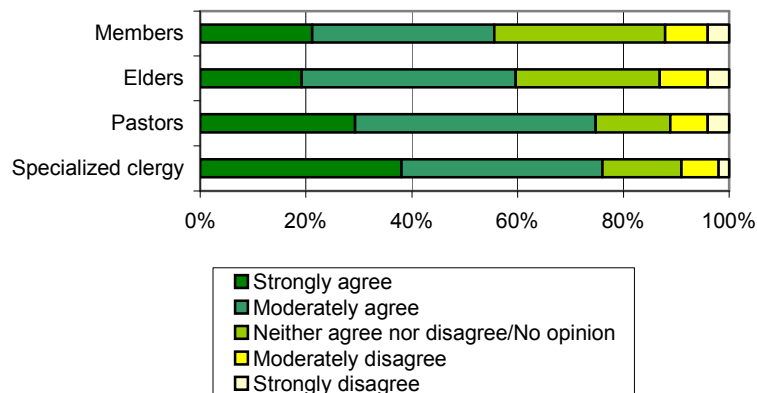
† statistically significant difference within each of the four constituencies ($p < .001$)

Presbyterian Involvement?

- ✓ At least three in five panelists in each group (members, 61%; elders, 66%; pastors, 74%; specialized clergy, 76%) *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that Presbyterians *can* contribute to building peace in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East.
- ✓ Majorities of panelists in each group (members, 55%; elders, 59%; pastors, 74%; specialized clergy, 76%) *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that Presbyterians *should* try to improve the situation in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East.

Figure 3. Opinion about Presbyterian Engagement in Middle East Issues

Presbyterians should try to improve the situation in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East.



ISRAEL/PALESTINE AND THE REST OF THE MIDDLE EAST

PC(USA) Investments and Israel/Palestine

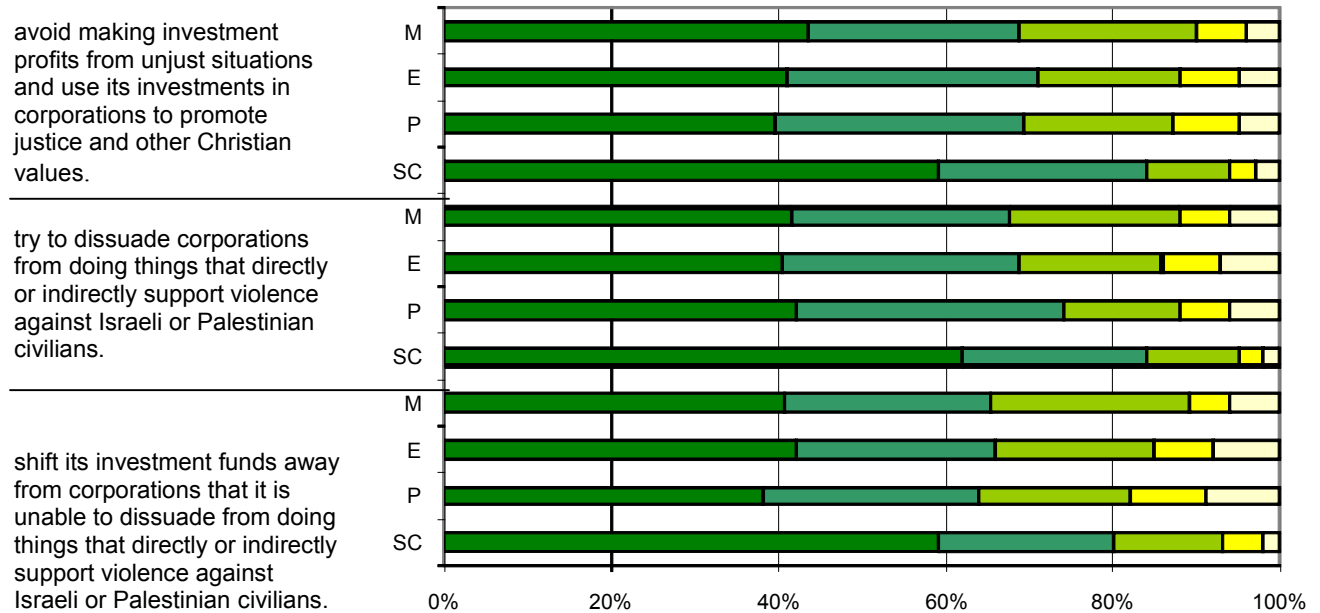
- ✓ At least two-thirds of panelists in each group (members, 68%; elders, 71%; pastors, 70%; specialized clergy, 84%) *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that the PC(USA) should avoid making investment profits from unjust situations and should use its investments in corporations to promote justice and other Christian values.

- ✓ Similar proportions of panelists in each group (members, 67%; elders, 68%; pastors, 74%; specialized clergy, 84%) *strongly agree* or *moderately agree* that the PC(USA) should try to dissuade corporations from doing things that directly or indirectly support violence against Israeli or Palestinian civilians.

- ✓ At least three in five panelists in each group (members, 66%; elders, 66%; pastors, 64%; specialized clergy, 80%) agree that the PC(USA) should shift its investment funds away from such corporations if it is unable to dissuade them from doing things that directly or indirectly support violence against Israeli or Palestinian civilians (as it already does from corporations involved in tobacco, military-related production, and human rights violations). (Figure 4 provides additional information.)

Figure 4. Opinion about PC(USA) Investment Policies

The PC(USA) should . . .



M = Members
 E = Elders
 P = Pastors
 SC = Specialized clergy

■ Strongly agree
 ■ Moderately agree
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree/No opinion
 ■ Moderately disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree

THE PRESBYTERIAN PANEL
CONFESSIONS AND OTHER TOPICS
AUGUST 2009 SURVEY
Survey Questions and Responses

	Members	Elders	Ministers
Number of survey invitations sent.....	888	1,083	1,454
Number of undeliverable surveys and ineligible respondents.....	9	7	11
Number of surveys completed.....	354	533	785 ‡
Response rate.....	40%	49%	54%
‡525 pastors; 251 specialized clergy			

	Members	Elders	Pastors	Specialized Clergy
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Israel/Palestine and the Middle East

Q18. How important is each of these for improving the situation in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East?

a. Achieving a nuclear-free Middle East

Very important.....	59%	52%	40%	40%
Important.....	23%	30%	34%	36%
Slightly important.....	7%	9%	14%	12%
Not at all important.....	4%	4%	6%	3%
No opinion.....	7%	6%	7%	9%

b. Addressing extremism and the threat of violence

Very important.....	72%	74%	71%	70%
Important.....	20%	19%	23%	25%
Slightly important.....	3%	3%	2%	2%
Not at all important.....	1%	1%	*	*
No opinion.....	5%	3%	4%	2%

c. Compliance with United Nations resolutions and human rights treaties

Very important.....	41%	40%	37%	46%
Important.....	37%	37%	39%	36%
Slightly important.....	10%	12%	14%	10%
Not at all important.....	5%	7%	4%	2%
No opinion.....	7%	5%	6%	5%

d. Freedom of worship at all major religious sites

Very important.....	65%	62%	51%	62%
Important.....	26%	29%	36%	28%
Slightly important.....	3%	4%	7%	5%
Not at all important.....	*	1%	1%	1%
No opinion.....	6%	4%	5%	2%

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero

— = zero (0.0); no cases in this category

+ = nonresponses of 10% or more on this question (reported percentages for all questions omit nonresponses)

n = number of respondents eligible to answer this question

◆ = percentages add to more than 100 because respondents could make more than one response

Q18. How important is each of these for improving the situation in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East?

[cont.]

e. Maintaining positive relations between Presbyterians and members of the U.S. Jewish community

Very important.....	40%	37%	32%	27%
Important.....	36%	40%	37%	39%
Slightly important.....	15%	15%	22%	23%
Not at all important.....	3%	4%	5%	9%
No opinion.....	6%	4%	4%	2%

f. Maintaining the close diplomatic and military relationship between the U.S. and Israeli governments

Very important.....	38%	38%	23%	22%
Important.....	36%	37%	36%	32%
Slightly important.....	14%	17%	28%	30%
Not at all important.....	4%	4%	7%	10%
No opinion.....	8%	4%	6%	5%

g. Promoting democracy throughout the Middle East

Very important.....	27%	28%	23%	19%
Important.....	34%	36%	32%	34%
Slightly important.....	24%	23%	32%	31%
Not at all important.....	7%	8%	8%	12%
No opinion.....	8%	6%	6%	3%

h. Providing for religious freedom throughout the Middle East

Very important.....	52%	52%	47%	51%
Important.....	34%	35%	38%	39%
Slightly important.....	7%	8%	9%	6%
Not at all important.....	1%	1%	1%	1%
No opinion.....	7%	4%	5%	2%

i. Reconciliation among racial-ethnic groups within Middle Eastern countries

Very important.....	45%	43%	57%	57%
Important.....	36%	38%	32%	35%
Slightly important.....	10%	10%	5%	6%
Not at all important.....	2%	3%	1%	—
No opinion.....	8%	6%	4%	2%

j. Reducing economic inequality within Middle Eastern countries

Very important.....	25%	24%	42%	48%
Important.....	38%	36%	35%	33%
Slightly important.....	23%	25%	15%	12%
Not at all important.....	4%	6%	3%	3%
No opinion.....	10%	9%	5%	4%

k. Refugee resettlement

Very important.....	26%	25%	40%	47%
Important.....	37%	40%	40%	36%
Slightly important.....	20%	22%	13%	10%
Not at all important.....	4%	4%	2%	2%
No opinion.....	12%	10%	6%	4%

Q18. How important is each of these for improving the situation in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East?

[cont.]

1. Supporting Christian minorities in Israel/Palestine

Very important.....	36%	38%	45%	42%
Slightly important.....	17%	14%	12%	14%
Not at all important.....	2%	2%	2%	2%
No opinion.....	8%	5%	5%	3%

Q19. Do you support a two-state solution in the Middle East with both a state of Israel and a state of Palestine?

Yes.....	65%	68%	78%	86%
No.....	5%	8%	7%	3%
Don't know.....	30%	24%	15%	11%

Q20. How much do you support or oppose each of the following?

a. Construction of a separation barrier between territory that the Israeli government administers and the Palestinian authorities administer

Strongly support.....	5%	8%	6%	6%
Neither support nor oppose.....	25%	28%	14%	15%
Moderately oppose.....	19%	17%	22%	18%
Strongly oppose.....	16%	17%	37%	42%
No opinion.....	21%	15%	9%	9%

b. Delivery by international organizations of humanitarian aid to people living in Palestinian territory occupied or controlled by Israel

Strongly support.....	34%	34%	58%	65%
Moderately support.....	36%	34%	27%	25%
Neither support nor oppose.....	13%	18%	6%	5%
Moderately oppose.....	3%	3%	1%	1%
Strongly oppose.....	2%	3%	1%	—
No opinion.....	13%	9%	7%	4%

c. Expansion of Israeli settlements further into the West Bank and East Jerusalem on Palestinian land

Strongly support.....	4%	3%	2%	1%
Moderately support.....	6%	7%	4%	4%
Neither support nor oppose.....	20%	22%	14%	6%
Moderately oppose.....	18%	20%	19%	15%
Strongly oppose.....	33%	34%	53%	68%
No opinion.....	19%	14%	8%	6%

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero

— = zero (0.0); no cases in this category

+ = nonresponses of 10% or more on this question (reported percentages for all questions omit nonresponses)

n = number of respondents eligible to answer this question

◆ = percentages add to more than 100 because respondents could make more than one response

Part Three: Study Materials

Q20. How much do you support or oppose each of the following?

[cont.]

d. The inclusion of democratically elected Hamas leaders in negotiations about the future of Israel/Palestine				
Strongly support.....	13%	11%	13%	24%
Moderately support.....	22%	30%	35%	37%
Neither support nor oppose.....	22%	24%	18%	15%
Moderately oppose.....	8%	8%	14%	7%
Strongly oppose.....	10%	14%	12%	7%
No opinion.....	24%	13%	9%	9%
e. Limiting the influence and military capacity of the Iranian government				
Strongly support.....	35%	40%	30%	24%
Moderately support.....	29%	26%	36%	36%
Neither support nor oppose.....	12%	17%	16%	24%
Moderately oppose.....	4%	4%	5%	5%
Strongly oppose.....	5%	3%	3%	3%
No opinion.....	15%	10%	9%	9%
f. Maintaining a U.S. military presence in Iraq				
Strongly support.....	14%	13%	7%	3%
Moderately support.....	24%	30%	20%	18%
Neither support nor oppose.....	12%	15%	14%	11%
Moderately oppose.....	24%	18%	28%	28%
Strongly oppose.....	18%	17%	26%	35%
No opinion.....	9%	6%	5%	5%
g. Permanent Israeli withdrawal from all of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem				
Strongly support.....	14%	11%	20%	35%
Moderately support.....	22%	22%	30%	26%
Neither support nor oppose.....	23%	28%	20%	18%
Moderately oppose.....	11%	13%	12%	6%
Strongly oppose.....	11%	11%	11%	6%
No opinion.....	19%	15%	8%	9%
h. Permanently disabling the military capacities of any Palestinian government				
Strongly support.....	10%	8%	5%	6%
Moderately support.....	14%	12%	11%	8%
Neither support nor oppose.....	24%	33%	28%	23%
Moderately oppose.....	18%	23%	32%	29%
Strongly oppose.....	11%	10%	16%	25%
No opinion.....	22%	14%	9%	9%
i. Permitting Gaza residents to enter the West Bank and Israel for trade or other legitimate purposes				
Strongly support.....	34%	32%	46%	59%
Moderately support.....	35%	40%	38%	28%
Neither support nor oppose.....	11%	15%	8%	6%
Moderately oppose.....	1%	1%	2%	1%
Strongly oppose.....	1%	1%	1%	*
No opinion.....	18%	11%	6%	5%

Q20. How much do you support or oppose each of the following?
[cont.]

j. The presence of United Nations peacekeepers to help supervise the border between Israel and Palestine				
Strongly support.....	33%	29%	38%	50%
Moderately support.....	40%	41%	39%	35%
Neither support nor oppose.....	11%	14%	13%	8%
Moderately oppose.....	3%	3%	3%	2%
Strongly oppose.....	3%	4%	3%	1%
No opinion.....	10%	8%	4%	4%

Q21. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

a. Presbyterians can contribute to peace-building in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East.

Strongly agree.....	18%	21%	30%	38%
Moderately agree.....	43%	45%	44%	38%
Neither agree nor disagree.....	20%	22%	11%	12%
Moderately disagree.....	9%	5%	7%	8%
Strongly disagree.....	3%	3%	4%	2%
No opinion.....	7%	5%	3%	2%

b. Presbyterians should try to improve the situation in Israel/Palestine and the rest of the Middle East.

Strongly agree.....	21%	19%	29%	38%
Moderately agree.....	34%	40%	45%	38%
Neither agree nor disagree.....	25%	23%	11%	13%
Moderately disagree.....	8%	9%	7%	7%
Strongly disagree.....	4%	4%	4%	2%
No opinion.....	7%	4%	3%	2%

c. The PC(USA) should avoid making investment profits from unjust situations and should use its investments in corporations to promote justice and other Christian values.

Strongly agree.....	43%	41%	40%	59%
Moderately agree.....	25%	30%	30%	25%
Neither agree nor disagree.....	12%	13%	14%	7%
Moderately disagree.....	6%	7%	8%	3%
Strongly disagree.....	4%	5%	5%	3%
No opinion.....	9%	4%	4%	3%

d. The PC(USA) should try to dissuade corporations from doing things that directly or indirectly support violence against Israeli or Palestinian civilians.

Strongly agree.....	41%	40%	42%	62%
Moderately agree.....	26%	28%	32%	22%
Neither agree nor disagree.....	13%	13%	10%	9%
Moderately disagree.....	6%	7%	6%	3%
Strongly disagree.....	6%	7%	6%	2%
No opinion.....	7%	4%	4%	2%

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

* = less than 0.5%; rounds to zero

— = zero (0.0); no cases in this category

+ = nonresponses of 10% or more on this question (reported percentages for all questions omit nonresponses)

n = number of respondents eligible to answer this question

◆ = percentages add to more than 100 because respondents could make more than one response

Part Three: Study Materials

Q21. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

[cont.]

- e. If the PC(USA) is unable to dissuade corporations from doing things that directly or indirectly support violence against Israeli or Palestinian civilians, it should shift PC(USA) investment funds away from those corporations (as it already does from corporations involved in tobacco, military-related production, and human rights violations).

Strongly agree	41%	42%	38%	59%
Moderately agree	25%	24%	26%	21%
Neither agree nor disagree	16%	13%	13%	9%
Moderately disagree.....	5%	7%	9%	5%
Strongly disagree	6%	8%	9%	2%
No opinion	8%	6%	5%	4%

Q22. Please use this space or another page for any additional comments.

[Not tabulated]

Response from:

Paper	70%	65%	50%	56%
Web	30%	35%	50%	44%

Appendix 4: The Amman Call

[The Amman Call was issued at the World Council of Churches' International Peace Conference, "Churches together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East," in Amman, Jordan, June, 18–20,2007.]

Amman imperatives:

1. Almost sixty years have passed since the Christian churches first spoke with one voice about Arab-Israeli peace. For the last forty years the Christian churches have called for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In the very place where Jesus Christ walked upon the earth, walls now separate families and the children of God—Christian, Muslim and Jew—are imprisoned in a deepening cycle of violence, humiliation and despair. The Palestinian Christians from Gaza to Jerusalem and to Nazareth, have called out to their brothers and sisters in Christ with this urgent plea: "Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action."
2. We welcome the timely and prophetic statement of the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem. We affirm that "the Churches are part of the conflict, because the Churches cannot remain silent while there is still suffering. The role of the Churches is to heal and to bring all sides to reconciliation." Our belief in God reminds us "that all God's children of all religions and political parties are to be respected." We assure the Churches of Palestine and Israel of our prayers, collaboration and resources.
3. Thus, in Amman, Jordan 18-20 June 2007, days that have witnessed a deepening of the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories, and also includes the United Nations World Refugee Day, we representatives of Christian churches and church-related organizations from every corner of the earth, affirm the decision of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and launch the "Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum" as an instrument to "*catalyze and co-ordinate new and existing church advocacy for peace, aimed at ending the illegal occupation in accordance with UN resolutions, and demonstrate its commitment to inter-religious action for peace and justice that serves all the peoples of the region.*"
4. This action has been taken in response to three fundamental imperatives that call us to action:
 - The ethical and theological imperative for a Just Peace
 - The ecumenical imperative for unity in action
 - The Gospel imperative for costly solidarity
5. The premises of this action are the following:
 - 5.1. That UN resolutions are the basis for peace and the Geneva conventions are applicable to the rights and responsibilities of the affected people.
 - 5.2. That Palestinians have the right of self-determination and the right of return.
 - 5.3. That a two-state solution must be viable politically, geographically economically and socially.
 - 5.4 That Jerusalem must be an open, accessible, inclusive and shared city for the two peoples and three religions.
 - 5.5 That both Palestine and Israel have legitimate security needs.
 - 5.6 That the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal, and constitute an obstacle to peace.
 - 5.7. That the "Separation Barrier" constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories is a grave breach of international law and must be removed from the occupied territory.

5.8. That there is no military solution for this conflict. Violence in all its forms cannot be justified whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians.

5.9. That comprehensive regional peace is indivisible from a just peace in Israel and Palestine.

5.10. That the life and witness of local churches is at the center of worldwide church advocacy for a just peace.

6. We understand the mandate of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum to be a space where we will develop comprehensive strategic approaches to the two processes of peace making and peace building. An inclusive core group convened urgently by the WCC should be mandated to facilitate this and also ensure improved coordination between all actors. The core group will be informed by the reports of the working groups of the Amman conference, and that its composition and mechanism be designed and announced by the WCC.

7. *Peace building will include the following:*

7.1. Furthering theological and biblical perspectives and Christian education resources around those issues central to the conflict.

7.2. Developing strategies that will support the processes of justice and reconciliation, including inter-religious dialogue and cooperation.

7.3. Strengthening the churches' responses to the occupation.

7.4. Recognizing, encouraging and cooperating with all efforts of Israeli and Palestinian civil society that are in accord with the vision and goals of the PIEF.

8. *Peace making will include the following:*

8.1. Defining and promoting measures, including economic ones, that could help end the occupation and enhance sustainable growth and development.

8.2. Strengthening existing efforts and identifying new models of church solidarity in action.

Supporting local churches and church related organizations not only to survive and continue their powerful ministries, including educational, health, cultural and social services, but also to thrive and be witnesses of hope.

8.3. Developing a long-term advocacy strategy in order to mobilize all of our constituencies and influence change.

Amman challenges:

9. We have heard the voices of the Christian churches of Palestine and Israel challenging and saying to us:

9.1. Act with us to liberate all peoples of this land from the logic of hatred, mutual rejection and death, so that they see in the other the face and dignity of God.

9.2. Pray with us in our efforts to resist evil in all of its guises.

9.3. Raise your voices along with ours as we speak "truth to power" and name with courage the injustices we see and experience. The illegal occupation has stolen two generations of lives in this tortured place, and threatens the next with hopelessness and rage.

9.4. Risk the curses and abuse that will be aimed at you and stand in solidarity with us and with our Palestinian brothers and sisters of all faiths as we defiantly reject the possibility that occupation will continue.

9.5. Help us to tear down walls and build and rebuild bridges among all peoples in the region.

Extremism on all sides produces chaos. It threatens to divide us and to destroy bridges among peoples that would lead to reconciliation and peace.

9.6. Add your hope to ours in the knowledge that evil and despair have been overcome through the death of our Lord on the Cross and through His Resurrection.

9.7. Insist with us that all dispossessed peoples, all refugees, have the right to return.

9.8. Partner with us as we seek peace and pursue it. Peace is possible. Christians and Muslims and Jews have, can and will understand one another and live together as neighbors.

10. And we representatives of Christian churches and church-related organizations from every corner of the earth, we respond:

11. Yes, we will. Together we will act and pray and speak and work and risk reputations and lives to build with you bridges for an enduring peace among the peoples of this tortured and beautiful place - Palestine and Israel- to end these decades of injustice, humiliation and insecurity, to end the decades of living as refugees and under occupation. We will work with you to seek peace and pursue it. We have allowed too much time to pass. Time has not served the cause of peace but has served the cause of extremism. This is our urgent cause that cannot wait.

Appendix 5:
Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth
A word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering

[Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth was issued by a group of Palestinian Christians at the meeting of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum, in Bethlehem, December 11, 2009.]

Introduction

We, a group of Christian Palestinians, after prayer, reflection and an exchange of opinion, cry out from within the suffering in our country, under the Israeli occupation, with a cry of hope in the absence of all hope, a cry full of prayer and faith in a God ever vigilant, in God's divine providence for all the inhabitants of this land. Inspired by the mystery of God's love for all, the mystery of God's divine presence in the history of all peoples and, in a particular way, in the history of our country, we proclaim our word based on our Christian faith and our sense of Palestinian belonging – a word of faith, hope and love.

Why now? Because today we have reached a dead end in the tragedy of the Palestinian people. The decision-makers content themselves with managing the crisis rather than committing themselves to the serious task of finding a way to resolve it. The hearts of the faithful are filled with pain and with questioning: What is the international community doing? What are the political leaders in Palestine, in Israel and in the Arab world doing? What is the Church doing? The problem is not just a political one. It is a policy in which human beings are destroyed, and this must be of concern to the Church.

We address ourselves to our brothers and sisters, members of our Churches in this land. We call out as Christians and as Palestinians to our religious and political leaders, to our Palestinian society and to the Israeli society, to the international community, and to our Christian brothers and sisters in the Churches around the world.

1. The reality on the ground

1.1 *“They say: ‘Peace, peace’ when there is no peace”* (Jer. 6:14). These days, everyone is speaking about peace in the Middle East and the peace process. So far, however, these are simply words; the reality is one of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, deprivation of our freedom and all that results from this situation:

1.1.1 The separation wall erected on Palestinian territory, a large part of which has been confiscated for this purpose, has turned our towns and villages into prisons, separating them from one another, making them dispersed and divided cantons. Gaza, especially after the cruel war Israel launched against it during December 2008 and January 2009, continues to live in inhuman conditions, under permanent blockade and cut off from the other Palestinian territories.

1.1.2 Israeli settlements ravage our land in the name of God and in the name of force, controlling our natural resources, including water and agricultural land, thus depriving hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, and constituting an obstacle to any political solution.

1.1.3 Reality is the daily humiliation to which we are subjected at the military checkpoints, as we make our way to jobs, schools or hospitals.

1.1.4 Reality is the separation between members of the same family, making family life impossible for thousands of Palestinians, especially where one of the spouses does not have an Israeli identity card.

1.1.5 Religious liberty is severely restricted; the freedom of access to the holy places is denied under the pretext of security. Jerusalem and its holy places are out of bounds for many Christians and Muslims

from the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Even Jerusalemites face restrictions during the religious feasts. Some of our Arab clergy are regularly barred from entering Jerusalem.

1.1.6 Refugees are also part of our reality. Most of them are still living in camps under difficult circumstances. They have been waiting for their right of return, generation after generation. What will be their fate?

1.1.7 And the prisoners? The thousands of prisoners languishing in Israeli prisons are part of our reality. The Israelis move heaven and earth to gain the release of one prisoner, and those thousands of Palestinian prisoners, when will they have their freedom?

1.1.8 Jerusalem is the heart of our reality. It is, at the same time, symbol of peace and sign of conflict. While the separation wall divides Palestinian neighbourhoods, Jerusalem continues to be emptied of its Palestinian citizens, Christians and Muslims. Their identity cards are confiscated, which means the loss of their right to reside in Jerusalem. Their homes are demolished or expropriated. Jerusalem, city of reconciliation, has become a city of discrimination and exclusion, a source of struggle rather than peace .

1.2 Also part of this reality is the Israeli disregard of international law and international resolutions, as well as the paralysis of the Arab world and the international community in the face of this contempt. Human rights are violated and despite the various reports of local and international human rights' organizations, the injustice continues.

1.1.2 Palestinians within the State of Israel, who have also suffered a historical injustice, although they are citizens and have the rights and obligations of citizenship, still suffer from discriminatory policies. They too are waiting to enjoy full rights and equality like all other citizens in the state.

1.3 Emigration is another element in our reality. The absence of any vision or spark of hope for peace and freedom pushes young people, both Muslim and Christian, to emigrate. Thus the land is deprived of its most important and richest resource – educated youth. The shrinking number of Christians, particularly in Palestine, is one of the dangerous consequences, both of this conflict, and of the local and international paralysis and failure to find a comprehensive solution to the problem.

1.4 In the face of this reality, Israel justifies its actions as self-defence, including occupation, collective punishment and all other forms of reprisals against the Palestinians. In our opinion, this vision is a reversal of reality. Yes, there is Palestinian resistance to the occupation. However, if there were no occupation, there would be no resistance, no fear and no insecurity. This is our understanding of the situation. Therefore, we call on the Israelis to end the occupation. Then they will see a new world in which there is no fear, no threat but rather security, justice and peace.

1.5 The Palestinian response to this reality was diverse. Some responded through negotiations: that was the official position of the Palestinian Authority, but it did not advance the peace process. Some political parties followed the way of armed resistance. Israel used this as a pretext to accuse the Palestinians of being terrorists and was able to distort the real nature of the conflict, presenting it as an Israeli war against terror, rather than an Israeli occupation faced by Palestinian legal resistance aiming at ending it.

1.5.1 The tragedy worsened with the internal conflict among Palestinians themselves, and with the separation of Gaza from the rest of the Palestinian territory. It is noteworthy that, even though the division is among Palestinians themselves, the international community bears an important responsibility for it since it refused to deal positively with the will of the Palestinian people expressed in the outcome of democratic and legal elections in 2006.

Again, we repeat and proclaim that our Christian word in the midst of all this, in the midst of our catastrophe, is a word of faith, hope and love.

2. A word of faith

We believe in one God, a good and just God

2.1 We believe in God, one God, Creator of the universe and of humanity. We believe in a good and just God, who loves each one of his creatures. We believe that every human being is created in God's image and likeness and that every one's dignity is derived from the dignity of the Almighty One. We believe that this dignity is one and the same in each and all of us. This means for us, here and now, in this land in particular, that God created us not so that we might engage in strife and conflict but rather that we might come and know and love one another, and together build up the land in love and mutual respect.

2.1.1 We also believe in God's eternal Word, His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whom God sent as the Saviour of the world.

2.1.2 We believe in the Holy Spirit, who accompanies the Church and all humanity on its journey. It is the Spirit that helps us to understand Holy Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, showing their unity, here and now. The Spirit makes manifest the revelation of God to humanity, past, present and future.

How do we understand the word of God?

2.2 We believe that God has spoken to humanity, here in our country: *"Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son, whom God appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds"* (Heb. 1:1-2)

2.2.1 We, Christian Palestinians, believe, like all Christians throughout the world, that Jesus Christ came in order to fulfil the Law and the Prophets. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and in his light and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we read the Holy Scriptures. We meditate upon and interpret Scripture just as Jesus Christ did with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. As it is written in the Gospel according to Saint Luke: *"Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures"* (Lk 24:27)

2.2.2 Our Lord Jesus Christ came, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was near. He provoked a revolution in the life and faith of all humanity. He came with *"a new teaching"* (Mk 1:27), casting a new light on the Old Testament, on the themes that relate to our Christian faith and our daily lives, themes such as the promises, the election, the people of God and the land. We believe that the Word of God is a living Word, casting a particular light on each period of history, manifesting to Christian believers what God is saying to us here and now. For this reason, it is unacceptable to transform the Word of God into letters of stone that pervert the love of God and His providence in the life of both peoples and individuals. This is precisely the error in fundamentalist Biblical interpretation that brings us death and destruction when the word of God is petrified and transmitted from generation to generation as a dead letter. This dead letter is used as a weapon in our present history in order to deprive us of our rights in our own land.

Our land has a universal mission

2.3 We believe that our land has a universal mission. In this universality, the meaning of the promises, of the land, of the election, of the people of God open up to include all of humanity, starting from all the peoples of this land. In light of the teachings of the Holy Bible, the promise of the land has never been a political programme, but rather the prelude to complete universal salvation. It was the initiation of the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

2.3.1 God sent the patriarchs, the prophets and the apostles to this land so that they might carry forth a universal mission to the world. Today we constitute three religions in this land, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Our land is God's land, as is the case with all countries in the world. It is holy inasmuch as God is present in it, for God alone is holy and sanctifier. It is the duty of those of us who live here, to respect the will of God for this land. It is our duty to liberate it from the evil of injustice and war. It is God's land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love. This is indeed possible. God has put us here

as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity, if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God's land: *"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it"* (Ps. 24:1).

2.3.2 Our presence in this land, as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, is not accidental but rather deeply rooted in the history and geography of this land, resonant with the connectedness of any other people to the land it lives in. It was an injustice when we were driven out. The West sought to make amends for what Jews had endured in the countries of Europe, but it made amends on our account and in our land. They tried to correct an injustice and the result was a new injustice.

2.3.3 Furthermore, we know that certain theologians in the West try to attach a biblical and theological legitimacy to the infringement of our rights. Thus, the promises, according to their interpretation, have become a menace to our very existence. The "good news" in the Gospel itself has become "a harbinger of death" for us. We call on these theologians to deepen their reflection on the Word of God and to rectify their interpretations so that they might see in the Word of God a source of life for all peoples.

2.3.4 Our connectedness to this land is a natural right. It is not an ideological or a theological question only. It is a matter of life and death. There are those who do not agree with us, even defining us as enemies only because we declare that we want to live as free people in our land. We suffer from the occupation of our land because we are Palestinians. And as Christian Palestinians we suffer from the wrong interpretation of some theologians. Faced with this, our task is to safeguard the Word of God as a source of life and not of death, so that "the good news" remains what it is, "good news" for us and for all. In face of those who use the Bible to threaten our existence as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, we renew our faith in God because we know that the word of God can not be the source of our destruction.

2.4 Therefore, we declare that any use of the Bible to legitimize or support political options and positions that are based upon injustice, imposed by one person on another, or by one people on another, transform religion into human ideology and strip the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth.

2.5 We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice.

3. Hope

3.1 Despite the lack of even a glimmer of positive expectation, our hope remains strong. The present situation does not promise any quick solution or the end of the occupation that is imposed on us. Yes, the initiatives, the conferences, visits and negotiations have multiplied, but they have not been followed up by any change in our situation and suffering. Even the new US position that has been announced by President Obama, with a manifest desire to put an end to the tragedy, has not been able to make a change in our reality. The clear Israeli response, refusing any solution, leaves no room for positive expectation. Despite this, our hope remains strong, because it is from God. God alone is good, almighty and loving and His goodness will one day be victorious over the evil in which we find ourselves. As Saint Paul said: *"If God is for us, who is against us? (...) Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long' (...) For I am convinced that (nothing) in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God"* (Rom. 8:31, 35, 36, 39).

What is the meaning of hope?

3.2 Hope within us means first and foremost our faith in God and secondly our expectation, despite everything, for a better future. Thirdly, it means not chasing after illusions – we realize that release is not close at hand. Hope is the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble, and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us. From this vision derives the strength to be steadfast, remain firm and work to change the reality in which we find ourselves. Hope means not giving in to evil but rather standing up to it and continuing to resist it. We see nothing in the present or future except ruin and destruction. We see the upper hand of the strong, the growing orientation towards racist separation and the imposition of laws that deny our existence and our dignity. We see confusion and division in the Palestinian position. If, despite all this, we do resist this reality today and work hard, perhaps the destruction that looms on the horizon may not come upon us.

Signs of hope

3.3 The Church in our land, her leaders and her faithful, despite her weakness and her divisions, does show certain signs of hope. Our parish communities are vibrant and most of our young people are active apostles for justice and peace. In addition to the individual commitment, our various Church institutions make our faith active and present in service, love and prayer.

3.3.1 Among the signs of hope are the local centres of theology, with a religious and social character. They are numerous in our different Churches. The ecumenical spirit, even if still hesitant, shows itself more and more in the meetings of our different Church families.

3.3.2 We can add to this the numerous meetings for inter-religious dialogue, Christian–Muslim dialogue, which includes the religious leaders and a part of the people. Admittedly, dialogue is a long process and is perfected through a daily effort as we undergo the same sufferings and have the same expectations. There is also dialogue among the three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as different dialogue meetings on the academic or social level. They all try to breach the walls imposed by the occupation and oppose the distorted perception of human beings in the heart of their brothers or sisters.

3.3.3 One of the most important signs of hope is the steadfastness of the generations, the belief in the justice of their cause and the continuity of memory, which does not forget the “Nakba” (catastrophe) and its significance. Likewise significant is the developing awareness among many Churches throughout the world and their desire to know the truth about what is going on here.

3.3.4 In addition to that, we see a determination among many to overcome the resentments of the past and to be ready for reconciliation once justice has been restored. Public awareness of the need to restore political rights to the Palestinians is increasing, and Jewish and Israeli voices, advocating peace and justice, are raised in support of this with the approval of the international community. True, these forces for justice and reconciliation have not yet been able to transform the situation of injustice, but they have their influence and may shorten the time of suffering and hasten the time of reconciliation.

The mission of the Church

3.4 Our Church is a Church of people who pray and serve. This prayer and service is prophetic, bearing the voice of God in the present and future. Everything that happens in our land, everyone who lives there, all the pains and hopes, all the injustice and all the efforts to stop this injustice, are part and parcel of the prayer of our Church and the service of all her institutions. Thanks be to God that our Church raises her voice against injustice despite the fact that some desire her to remain silent, closed in her religious devotions.

3.4.1 The mission of the Church is prophetic, to speak the Word of God courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events. If she does take sides, it is with the oppressed, to stand alongside them, just as Christ our Lord stood by the side of each poor person and each sinner, calling them to repentance, life, and the restoration of the dignity bestowed on them by God and that no one has the right to strip away.

3.4.2 The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice, peace and dignity. Our vocation as a living Church is to bear witness to the goodness of God and the dignity of human beings. We are called to pray and to make our voice heard when we announce a new society where human beings believe in their own dignity and the dignity of their adversaries.

3.4.3 Our Church points to the Kingdom, which cannot be tied to any earthly kingdom. Jesus said before Pilate that he was indeed a king but *“my kingdom is not from this world”* (Jn 18:36). Saint Paul says: *“The Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom.14:17). Therefore, religion cannot favour or support any unjust political regime, but must rather promote justice, truth and human dignity. It must exert every effort to purify regimes where human beings suffer injustice and human dignity is violated. The Kingdom of God on earth is not dependent on any political orientation, for it is greater and more inclusive than any particular political system.

3.4.4 Jesus Christ said: *“The Kingdom of God is among you”* (Luke 17:21). This Kingdom that is present among us and in us is the extension of the mystery of salvation. It is the presence of God among us and our sense of that presence in everything we do and say. It is in this divine presence that we shall do what we can until justice is achieved in this land.

3.4.5 The cruel circumstances in which the Palestinian Church has lived and continues to live have required the Church to clarify her faith and to identify her vocation better. We have studied our vocation and have come to know it better in the midst of suffering and pain: today, we bear the strength of love rather than that of revenge, a culture of life rather than a culture of death. This is a source of hope for us, for the Church and for the world.

3.5 The Resurrection is the source of our hope. Just as Christ rose in victory over death and evil, so too we are able, as each inhabitant of this land is able, to vanquish the evil of war. We will remain a witnessing, steadfast and active Church in the land of the Resurrection.

4. Love

The commandment of love

4.1 Christ our Lord said: *“Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another”* (Jn 13:34). He has already showed us how to love and how to treat our enemies. He said: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous (...) Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”* (Matt. 5:45–47). Saint Paul also said: *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil”* (Rom. 12:17). And Saint Peter said: *“Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called”* (1 Pet. 3:9).

Resistance

4.2 This word is clear. Love is the commandment of Christ our Lord to us and it includes both friends and enemies. This must be clear when we find ourselves in circumstances where we must resist evil of whatever kind.

4.2.1 Love is seeing the face of God in every human being. Every person is my brother or my sister. However, seeing the face of God in everyone does not mean accepting evil or aggression on their part. Rather, this love seeks to correct the evil and stop the aggression.

The aggression against the Palestinian people which is the Israeli occupation, is an evil that must be resisted. It is an evil and a sin that must be resisted and removed. Primary responsibility for this rests with the Palestinians themselves suffering occupation. Christian love invites us to resist it. However, love puts an end to evil by walking in the ways of justice. Responsibility lies also with the international community, because international law regulates relations between peoples today. Finally responsibility lies with the perpetrators of the injustice; they must liberate themselves from the evil that is in them and the injustice they have imposed on others.

4.2.2 When we review the history of the nations, we see many wars and much resistance to war by war, to violence by violence. The Palestinian people has gone the way of the peoples, particularly in the first stages of its struggle with the Israeli occupation. However, it also engaged in peaceful struggle, especially during the first Intifada. We recognize that all peoples must find a new way in their relations with each other and the resolution of their conflicts. The ways of force must give way to the ways of justice. This applies above all to the peoples that are militarily strong, mighty enough to impose their injustice on the weaker.

4.2.3 We say that our option as Christians in the face of the Israeli occupation is to resist. Resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as its logic. It is thus a creative resistance for it must find human ways that engage the humanity of the enemy. Seeing the image of God in the face of the enemy means taking up positions in the light of this vision of active resistance to stop the injustice and oblige the perpetrator to end his aggression and thus achieve the desired goal, which is getting back the land, freedom, dignity and independence.

4.2.4 Christ our Lord has left us an example we must imitate. We must resist evil but he taught us that we cannot resist evil with evil. This is a difficult commandment, particularly when the enemy is determined to impose himself and deny our right to remain here in our land. It is a difficult commandment yet it alone can stand firm in the face of the clear declarations of the occupation authorities that refuse our existence and the many excuses these authorities use to continue imposing occupation upon us.

4.2.5 Resistance to the evil of occupation is integrated, then, within this Christian love that refuses evil and corrects it. It resists evil in all its forms with methods that enter into the logic of love and draw on all energies to make peace. We can resist through civil disobedience. We do not resist with death but rather through respect of life. We respect and have a high esteem for all those who have given their life for our nation. And we affirm that every citizen must be ready to defend his or her life, freedom and land.

4.2.6 Palestinian civil organizations, as well as international organizations, NGOs and certain religious institutions call on individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance. These advocacy campaigns must be carried out with courage, openly sincerely proclaiming that their object is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice. The aim is to free both peoples from extremist positions of the different Israeli governments, bringing both to justice and reconciliation. In this spirit and with this dedication we will eventually reach the longed-for resolution to our problems, as indeed happened in South Africa and with many other liberation movements in the world.

4.3 Through our love, we will overcome injustices and establish foundations for a new society both for us and for our opponents. Our future and their future are one. Either the cycle of violence that destroys both of us or peace that will benefit both. We call on Israel to give up its injustice towards us, not to twist the truth of reality of the occupation by pretending that it is a battle against terrorism. The roots of “terrorism” are in the human injustice committed and in the evil of the occupation. These must be removed if there be a sincere intention to remove “terrorism.” We call on the people of Israel to be our

partners in peace and not in the cycle of interminable violence. Let us resist evil together, the evil of occupation and the infernal cycle of violence.

5. Our word to our brothers and sisters

5.1 We all face, today, a way that is blocked and a future that promises only woe. Our word to all our Christian brothers and sisters is a word of hope, patience, steadfastness and new action for a better future. Our word is that we, as Christians we carry a message, and we will continue to carry it despite the thorns, despite blood and daily difficulties. We place our hope in God, who will grant us relief in His own time. At the same time, we continue to act in concord with God and God's will, building, resisting evil and bringing closer the day of justice and peace.

5.2 We say to our Christian brothers and sisters: This is a time for repentance. Repentance brings us back into the communion of love with everyone who suffers, the prisoners, the wounded, those afflicted with temporary or permanent handicaps, the children who cannot live their childhood and each one who mourns a dear one. The communion of love says to every believer in spirit and in truth: if my brother is a prisoner I am a prisoner; if his home is destroyed, my home is destroyed; when my brother is killed, then I too am killed. We face the same challenges and share in all that has happened and will happen. Perhaps, as individuals or as heads of Churches, we were silent when we should have raised our voices to condemn the injustice and share in the suffering. This is a time of repentance for our silence, indifference, lack of communion, either because we did not persevere in our mission in this land and abandoned it, or because we did not think and do enough to reach a new and integrated vision and remained divided, contradicting our witness and weakening our word. Repentance for our concern with our institutions, sometimes at the expense of our mission, thus silencing the prophetic voice given by the Spirit to the Churches.

5.3 We call on Christians to remain steadfast in this time of trial, just as we have throughout the centuries, through the changing succession of states and governments. Be patient, steadfast and full of hope so that you might fill the heart of every one of your brothers or sisters who shares in this same trial with hope. *"Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you"* (1 Pet. 3:15). Be active and, provided this conforms to love, participate in any sacrifice that resistance asks of you to overcome our present travail ..

5.4 Our numbers are few but our message is great and important. Our land is in urgent need of love. Our love is a message to the Muslim and to the Jew, as well as to the world.

5.4.1 Our message to the Muslims is a message of love and of living together and a call to reject fanaticism and extremism. It is also a message to the world that Muslims are neither to be stereotyped as the enemy nor caricatured as terrorists but rather to be lived with in peace and engaged with in dialogue.

5.4.2 Our message to the Jews tells them: Even though we have fought one another in the recent past and still struggle today, we are able to love and live together. We can organize our political life, with all its complexity, according to the logic of this love and its power, after ending the occupation and establishing justice.

5.4.3 The word of faith says to anyone engaged in political activity: human beings were not made for hatred. It is not permitted to hate, neither is it permitted to kill or to be killed. The culture of love is the culture of accepting the other. Through it we perfect ourselves and the foundations of society are established.

6. Our word to the Churches of the world

6.1 Our word to the Churches of the world is firstly a word of gratitude for the solidarity you have shown toward us in word, deed and presence among us. It is a word of praise for the many Churches and Christians who support the right of the Palestinian people for self determination. It is a message of

solidarity with those Christians and Churches who have suffered because of their advocacy for law and justice.

However, it is also a call to repentance; to revisit fundamentalist theological positions that support certain unjust political options with regard to the Palestinian people. It is a call to stand alongside the oppressed and preserve the word of God as good news for all rather than to turn it into a weapon with which to slay the oppressed. The word of God is a word of love for all His creation. God is not the ally of one against the other, nor the opponent of one in the face of the other. God is the Lord of all and loves all, demanding justice from all and issuing to all of us the same commandments. We ask our sister Churches not to offer a theological cover-up for the injustice we suffer, for the sin of the occupation imposed upon us. Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you able to help us get our freedom back, for this is the only way you can help the two peoples attain justice, peace, security and love?

6.2 In order to understand our reality, we say to the Churches: Come and see. We will fulfil our role to make known to you the truth of our reality, receiving you as pilgrims coming to us to pray, carrying a message of peace, love and reconciliation. You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike.

6.3 We condemn all forms of racism, whether religious or ethnic, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and we call on you to condemn it and oppose it in all its manifestations. At the same time we call on you to say a word of truth and to take a position of truth with regard to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land. As we have already said, we see boycott and disinvestment as tools of non violence for justice, peace and security for all.

7. Our word to the international community

7. Our word to the international community is to stop the principle of "double standards" and insist on the international resolutions regarding the Palestinian problem with regard to all parties. Selective application of international law threatens to leave us vulnerable to a law of the jungle. It legitimizes the claims by certain armed groups and states that the international community only understands the logic of force. Therefore, we call for a response to what the civil and religious institutions have proposed, as mentioned earlier: the beginning of a system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel. We repeat once again that this is not revenge but rather a serious action in order to reach a just and definitive peace that will put an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and will guarantee security and peace for all.

8. Jewish and Muslim religious leaders

8. Finally, we address an appeal to the religious and spiritual leaders, Jewish and Muslim, with whom we share the same vision that every human being is created by God and has been given equal dignity. Hence the obligation for each of us to defend the oppressed and the dignity God has bestowed on them. Let us together try to rise up above the political positions that have failed so far and continue to lead us on the path of failure and suffering.

9. A call to our Palestinian people and to the Israelis

9.1 This is a call to see the face of God in each one of God's creatures and overcome the barriers of fear or race in order to establish a constructive dialogue and not remain within the cycle of never-ending manoeuvres that aim to keep the situation as it is. Our appeal is to reach a common vision, built on equality and sharing, not on superiority, negation of the other or aggression, using the pretext of fear and security. We say that love is possible and mutual trust is possible. Thus, peace is possible and definitive reconciliation also. Thus, justice and security will be attained for all.

9.2 Education is important. Educational programs must help us to get to know the other as he or she is rather than through the prism of conflict, hostility or religious fanaticism. The educational programs in place today are infected with this hostility. The time has come to begin a new education that allows one to

see the face of God in the other and declares that we are capable of loving each other and building our future together in peace and security.

9.3 Trying to make the state a religious state, Jewish or Islamic, suffocates the state, confines it within narrow limits, and transforms it into a state that practices discrimination and exclusion, preferring one citizen over another. We appeal to both religious Jews and Muslims: let the state be a state for all its citizens, with a vision constructed on respect for religion but also equality, justice, liberty and respect for pluralism and not on domination by a religion or a numerical majority.

9.4 To the leaders of Palestine we say that current divisions weaken all of us and cause more sufferings. Nothing can justify these divisions. For the good of the people, which must outweigh that of the political parties, an end must be put to division. We appeal to the international community to lend its support towards this union and to respect the will of the Palestinian people as expressed freely.

9.5 Jerusalem is the foundation of our vision and our entire life. She is the city to which God gave a particular importance in the history of humanity. She is the city towards which all people are in movement—and where they will meet in friendship and love in the presence of the One Unique God, according to the vision of the prophet Isaiah: *“In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it (...) He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Is. 2: 2–5). Today, the city is inhabited by two peoples of three religions; and it is on this prophetic vision and on the international resolutions concerning the totality of Jerusalem that any political solution must be based. This is the first issue that should be negotiated because the recognition of Jerusalem’s sanctity and its message will be a source of inspiration towards finding a solution to the entire problem, which is largely a problem of mutual trust and ability to set in place a new land in this land of God.

10. Hope and faith in God

10. In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God’s goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persist in our land. We will see here “a new land” and “a new human being,” capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters.