



June 23rd, 2010

Dear Commissioner,

With greetings from Israel, I write to you as someone whose career as a cabinet member, a member of Parliament and peace activist has been defined by vigorous engagement in the pursuit of reconciliation and coexistence in the Middle East. I was an initiator of the historic Oslo peace process between Palestinians and Israelis, and successfully sponsored legislation to guarantee equal representation for the Arab minority in my country itself.

Having been blessed with so many friends of all stripes across the United States, I recognize the importance of the Presbyterian Church (USA) as a faith community and a part of American society. I can imagine how weighty are the responsibilities of your service at the 219th General Assembly of the PC (USA).

It is in this vein, and in a spirit of friendship and genuine respect, that I write to you. It goes without saying that I would not normally comment on policy deliberations such as those at the General Assembly, but I am confident that you would appreciate direct and honest perspectives from someone impacted by particular such deliberations.

I know that, over recent years, your partners from the spectrum of the mainstream American Jewish community have shared their hope that prospective PC (USA) actions on the Arab-Israeli conflict would reflect a sensitive, nuanced and balanced approach, and avoid importing the tensions of the Middle East beyond the region.

I, too, would urge that you decline adopting materials and proposals that place inordinate blame on Israel for the conflict, without due appreciation for the extent of the physical threats – both rhetoric and deeds – that its people face. As much so, the singling out for censure or punitive measures of businesses engaged with one side to one complex conflict is highly counterproductive. Among the overtures before you is a call for divestment from such a company. The Middle East Study Committee report would also both call into question vital American aid to Israel while viewing positively, without stated qualification, the polemical “Kairos Palestine” document – which promotes a blanket “system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel” alone. I do believe in economic sanctions, but when they are directed against democracies they are counter-productive.



For all its shortcomings, Israel is a democracy, and one well-known for extraordinarily robust political debate. However, narratives and activism that appear to target Israelis or exclude recognition of any of Israel's positive contributions to peace only make the people of my country, including the most progressive and moderate of us, feel isolated, insecure and less capable of encouraging the kinds of concessions and risks for peace that I have long strongly advocated.

I urge you to act for peace in a way that strengthens Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers alike.

Shalom,

Yossi Beilin

Chairman
The Geneva Initiative