

**PRESBYTERIANS FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE**

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JOIN US FOR BREAKFAST ON SUNDAY  
JULY 4 AT THE HILTON (DETAILS INSIDE)

# SEEKING A LASTING PEACE

Please Join us for Breakfast and Discussion



Sunday, July 4, 2010

7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Hyatt Hotel, Nicollett Ballroom

*tickets are \$15 in advance*

## Speakers:

Rev. Dr. Katharine Henderson

President, Auburn Seminary

Rachel Lerner

Vice President, J Street Education Fund

Dr. Byron Shafer

Middle East Study Committee

Sponsored By

PRESBYTERIANS FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE



## PRESBYTERIANS FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Dear Commissioner,

"Breaking Down the Walls," the Report of the Middle East Study Committee (MESC), is a partisan document that would move the Presbyterian Church (USA) far away from our historic role as peacemakers. The report has produced a wave of protest across our denomination.

- A large group of Presbyterians, including pastors from some of our largest progressive and centrist congregations, recently released a pastoral letter asking for the 2010 General Assembly to reject the report, calling it "unbalanced, historically inaccurate, theologically flawed, and politically damaging."
- A letter from the pastors of some of our denomination's largest congregations has been sent to the members of Committee 14 asking them to reconsider the agenda of their meeting since it devotes 94% of the docket time to what is oftentimes described as the "Palestinian narrative."
- An online petition has been signed by a large number of Presbyterian lay and ordained leaders. It states "The report veers sharply from the PCUSA's long and consistent policies regarding Israel and Palestine."
- Respected interfaith organizations such as the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel and the Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies have raised concerns about the content and tone of the proposed policies.
- Presbyterian senators and congressmen are expressing criticism of the content and tone of the document's proposed policies.
- A broad range of Middle East experts and scholars are alarmed by the unfair, biased, and sloppy nature of the report.
- Christian Century has published a sharp rebuke of the report by Vanderbilt University professors Ted Smith and Amy-Jill Levine, available online at <http://bit.ly/deeE0y>
- Jewish organizations representing the vast majority of members of the Jewish faith in America believe that the proposed policies, if implemented, will be a giant step backward in Jewish relations with mainline Protestant denominations.
- Ironically, voices within the Jewish community that are commended by the MESC Report have disassociated themselves from the Report's recommendations.
  - The Jewish peace advocacy group J Street publicly condemned the report and its recommendations, adding that it found "unfair," "distasteful" and "stereotyping"

that the report cited J Street positively when no one from the MESC ever spoke with anyone at J Street.

- Rabbi Ron Kronish who wrote an article that is included in the Report's appendix, upon seeing the Report's recommendations, has publicly written that he disagrees with the recommendations and the long pro-Palestinian "historical analysis" which consumes one-third of the Report.

Is the widespread criticism of the report from all parts of the church and beyond fair? Enclosed in this packet is information we think you will find valuable as you consider that question. We feel the criticism is more than justified. We believe the report should be rejected.

Past General Assemblies of our denomination have produced pages of peacemaking policies on Middle East issues that are more than sufficient to guide the PCUSA's continued peacemaking efforts in that troubled region. Some of our policies are very critical of aspects of behavior and policies of the Israeli government. Other policies are very critical of aspects of the policy and behavior of the Palestinians. However, all of our policies are marked by an effort to remain a trusted mediator by both groups whose aspirations for safety and prosperity we admire.

To help you in your decision making process, we have included in this packet:

1. Clear Reasons to Reject the Middle East Study Committee Report, a letter and petition created by Presbyterians for Middle East Peace that has been signed by hundreds of concerned Presbyterians
2. Pastoral letter from leaders of three Presbyterian seminaries and several large churches
3. Congressional letter from five Presbyterian members of the United States Senate
4. The Middle East Study Committee Report: A Response and Recommendation from Presbyterian leaders in Houston, TX
5. Letter of concerns about the process of Committee 14 signed by sixteen pastors
6. Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies letter
7. Breaking Down the Walls: A Constructive Response from the National Christian Leadership Conference on Israel
8. Jewish Agencies statement
9. J Street statement
10. Three Jewish denominational statements

After reviewing the materials in this package, if you have questions, please contact us at Presbyterians for Middle East Peace at [www.pfmeop.org](http://www.pfmeop.org) We will get back to you immediately. At the General Assembly, you can speak to us personally at Presbyterians Concerned for Jewish, Muslim and Christian Relations/Presbyterians for Middle East Peace booth number 1011.

Thank you for your service as a commissioner. We are praying for you!

Yours in Christ,

Presbyterians for Middle East Peace

## Clear Reasons to Reject the Middle East Study Committee Report

Created by Presbyterians for Middle East Peace

*An ad hoc group of PCUSA pastors and lay members with a strong desire for the PCUSA to be  
an effective peacemaker in the Middle East*

The report veers sharply from the PCUSA's long and consistent policies regarding Israel and Palestine by:

- Moving from criticism of aspects of Israel's occupation of the West Bank to a position that the occupation is THE problem in the conflict. The report claims that if the occupation ended tomorrow, peace would result. Not even the most naïve believe such a scenario to be true. Consider what happened when Israel withdrew from Gaza (p. 8).<sup>1</sup>
- Wanting to circulate the Kairos Palestine document for denominational study, a document that advocates for a non-Jewish Israel. This directly contradicts the PCUSA's longtime affirmation of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. The Kairos document also calls for an economic boycott against Israel, something the PCUSA has always rejected for sound reasons. (Recommendation III (f))
- Stating a general concern for Israel's security yet inexplicably calling for an unconditional lifting of the embargo of Gaza. Lifting all aspects of the embargo (in contrast to advocating for an increased flow of humanitarian aid) would surely lead to a massive influx of rockets and weaponry to be used by Hamas against Israeli citizens. This blunt demand stands in sharp contrast with past, much-more-nuanced understandings of Middle East realities. (Recommendation IV (d))
- Calling on the U.S. government to withhold financial, economic, and military aid to countries (anywhere in the world) "where civil, religious and other freedoms of their peoples are (not) fully exercised." If enacted, such an action would effectively end foreign aid for *any* country, which is totally counter to Presbyterian lobbying efforts to support U.S. foreign aid. For example, countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya would be denied U.S. foreign aid. (Recommendation V (h))
- Failing to engage the mainstream American Jewish community in dialogue (as the PCUSA has done in the past) before proposing actions that relate to Israel and Palestine. The Committee intentionally chose NOT to speak with the many rabbis and Jewish leaders with whom Presbyterian pastors and congregations relate on a regular basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Page and recommendation numbers are from the report itself.

- Including a 68-page narrative written by two Study Group members who conclude that Jews in Israel have no relationship with the Jews of ancient times
- After spending a large amount of money for the past two years during a time of PCUSA financial crisis, the Study Group requests that it be continued for another two years and calls for yet another expensive trip to the Middle East “by a high-level joint delegation of Presbyterians (including representatives from the Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Foundation, and the General Assembly Mission Council).” We cannot afford two more expensive years with negligible results. (Recommendation III (e))

The signatories to this petition can be found at [WWW.PFMEP.ORG](http://WWW.PFMEP.ORG)

June 11, 2010

### A Pastoral Letter in Response to the MESC Report on the Middle East

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This summer, in Minneapolis, at the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), our denomination will consider the *Report of the Middle East Study Committee*. The committee members who authored this document seek to chart a path toward peace—a just peace—in a region consumed by distrust, hatred and inter-religious violence. In this they are to be commended. Peace for the Middle East is a holy objective and as Presbyterians we join together in hoping and praying that every person who lives in Israel, Palestine and across the entire region will live to see God’s justice “rolling down like waters.” (Amos 5:24) May it be so! May it be soon!

**Many of us, like the members of MESC, have traveled and studied in the Middle East, interviewing national, religious, and community leaders, and spending time on the ground in both Israel and the West Bank. After careful study of the report we conclude that the *Report of the Middle East Study Committee* is unbalanced, historically inaccurate, theologically flawed, and politically damaging. Its critical defects threaten the Presbyterian Church’s impartial role as a peacemaker and jeopardize our credibility as we attempt to speak to a complex situation. Recent events in the Middle East underscore the fact that for Presbyterians to play an ongoing role in making peace in the world, we must avoid choosing sides even in a time when we must decry injustice and speak out for victims of violence. Although the report cries out for justice, we believe that it will ultimately do an injustice of its own.**

**This report is not balanced.**

- The nine-member committee drew on its own personal knowledge and experience to articulate the Palestinian view of tensions in Israel-Palestine. This is appropriate. The suffering of Palestinians is real and tragic. Pro-Palestinian voices and perspectives must be at the table. At the same time, there is conspicuous absence of other crucially important voices in the conversation. **Regrettably, the authors of this report have had little or no dialogue with organizations that fall within the mainstream of the American Jewish community.** In our own ministries, we have found such dialogue to be of crucial importance. At times, this dialogue is painful. We do not always agree. Yet, if Presbyterians are to speak with authority (and are to be trusted) on such matters, it is absolutely crucial that we engage all of the key parties in this discussion. In the absence of actual engagement, the report holds out hope that mainstream American Jewish organizations like J Street might be potentially positive conversation partners. We agree. J Street is a political organization in Washington D.C. that advocates “for vigorous U.S. leadership to achieve a two state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” However, we called J Street and learned that, in fact, they were never contacted by the study committee, and have since issued a statement condemning the committee’s report.

- **The imbalance in this report becomes painfully obvious when one considers the space that it allots for various perspectives.** It offers a 71-page “Plea for Justice” that reflects an exclusively pro-Palestinian perspective written by two members of the committee. This is placed next to a 9-page reflection by a rabbi with whom the committee met in Jerusalem. (Unfortunately, the rabbi, Dr. Ron Kronish, states that he was not presented with either the report or its recommendations prior to publishing, so that his perspective could be in dialogue with theirs. Rabbi Kronish has now written that he does not and cannot support the recommendations made in this report, nor does he “agree in any way with the ‘historical analysis’ in the appendix.”)
- The report rightly raises concern for a dwindling Christian presence in Israel and Palestine and challenges the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as well as the establishment of settlements beyond Israel’s borders. **But it fails to condemn several important and disturbing elements that prevent peace. The report does not specifically call upon Palestinian leaders to condemn violence against Israeli citizens. There is no call to neighboring nations to recognize the legitimate right of Israel to exist as a state and no affirmation of the right of Israeli citizens to defend themselves against aggression and to live in peace without the threat of terrorism.** In a similarly imbalanced way, the endorsement of the Kairos Palestine document represents a troubling and weighted perspective which should not be commended because of its particularly one-sided views.

**This report is historically inaccurate.**

- It manifests a decidedly one-sided analysis of a complicated history. To see a clear example of this, note section 2.3 of the “Plea for Justice,” entitled, *The 1967 War*. This section begins with the following sentences, “In June 1967, Israel attacked Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. At the end of six days, Israel had taken the Gaza strip and the Sinai from Egypt, East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan, and the Golan from Syria.” Without crucial historical background, these two sentences imply an unprovoked land-grab by Israel. It does not tell of numerous provocations by Israel’s neighbors—border clashes with Jordan, shelling from Syria, Egypt’s decision to dismiss the United Nations buffer force in the Sinai and to bring 1,000 tanks and 100,000 troops to that border, even as it initiated a blockade of Israeli ships.
- It is not appropriate for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to endorse a one-sided view of history. Such imbalances will not further the cause of peace. **If we are going to wade into this complex conflict in hopes of advocating for justice and peace, we need to be balanced, fair, and accurate when presenting its history.** This report does not achieve these essential objectives.



**Important parts of the report are theologically flawed.**

- Early on, the authors state that the Holocaust (the extermination of 6 million Jews in Nazi Germany) is a unique event and cannot be compared to any other historical event. They were right to do this. However, in their conclusion to the document, they use a famous quotation by anti-Nazi pastor Martin Niemoller to do exactly what they counseled should not be done. They compare the present situation in Israel and Palestine to the Holocaust, and in so doing, they place the Palestinians in the place of the Jew and the Jew in the place of the Nazis. **We dare not make such awkward comparisons between such vastly different situations.** This is a particularly troubling theological convolution.
- Though the report is generally critical of terrorism, it sometimes speaks euphemistically about terrorist acts, naming them “violent resistance.” Of equal concern are several statements in the report that tend toward excusing terrorist acts committed by Palestinian radicals as understandable, or as being Israel’s fault [see 5.2 on page 176] in light of the Palestinian people’s deep frustration and anger. **We believe that it is inappropriate for an official document of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to, in any measure, imply sympathy for or understanding of acts that would deliberately murder innocent men, women, and children.**

**The report is politically damaging.**

- Not only would the approval of the report effectively severely strain dialogue between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and most American and Israeli Jewish organizations, we believe it would also have two unintended but tragic effects. First, such a document from a major American Christian denomination would increase the sense of isolation that many Israelis already feel, effectively encouraging moderate and progressive Israeli Jews to see their situation in the same way that the Israeli right often does, perceiving that the world is aligned against them and that Israel must guarantee its security without regard to international opinion. Second, a document like the MESC Report could well play into the hands of more extreme Palestinian voices, suggesting to them that it will be possible to make peace and achieve national aspirations entirely on their terms, without need for compromises. Both these potential “real-world” effects of the report would, ironically, further the very alienation and polarization that the report rightly decries.

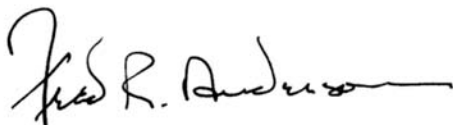
Thus it is with great reluctance, that we, the undersigned, ask the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) not to approve the MESC Report. We say this with great reluctance because much in the report is powerful and admirable. The report faithfully chronicles the suffering of Palestinian brothers and sisters in Christ. It identifies the longing for peace that we all share. But important elements of the complex nature of the Middle East’s context are absent in the analysis and recommendations which are offered. **Therefore, unhappily, we conclude that the failures noted above and the overall imbalance of the document make it inappropriate as an official position for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).**



The Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams  
Retired Senior Pastor, Morningside Presbyterian  
Church, Atlanta GA



The Rev. Joseph J. Clifford, D. Min.  
Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Dallas TX



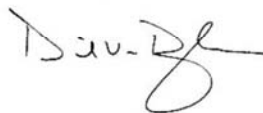
The Rev. Dr. Fred R. Anderson, D. Min.  
Pastor, Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church,  
New York City



The Rev. Dr. William P. Crawford  
Senior Pastor, Larchmont Avenue Church,  
Larchmont NY



The Rev. Dr. John M. Buchanan  
Pastor, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago IL



The Rev. Dr. David A. Van Dyke  
Pastor, Head of Staff, House of Hope,  
St. Paul MN



The Rev. Dr. Cynthia McCall Campbell  
President, McCormick Theological Seminary,  
Chicago IL



The Rev. Dr. Katharine R. Henderson, President  
Auburn Theological Seminary, New York City



The Rev. Charles P. Henderson  
Executive Director, ARIL/CrossCurrents,  
New York City



The Rev. Mark D. Hotstetter  
Chair of the Board, Auburn Theological  
Seminary, New York City



Mr. Gustav Niebuhr,  
Member of the Board, Auburn Theological  
Seminary, New York City



The Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston  
Senior Pastor, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian  
Church, New York City



The Rev. Dr. Jon M. Walton  
Senior Pastor, The First Presbyterian Church,  
New York City



The Rev. James Kitchens  
Interim Pastor, Calvary Presbyterian Church,  
San Francisco CA



The Rev. Theodore J. Wardlaw  
President, Austin Presbyterian Theological  
Seminary, Austin TX



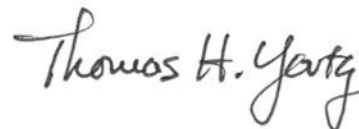
The Rev. Michael L. Lindvall  
Pastor, Brick Presbyterian Church,  
New York City



The Rev. Dr. George B. Wirth  
Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Atlanta GA



Dr. Blair R. Monie  
Pastor, Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church,  
Dallas TX



The Rev. Thomas H. Yorty  
Senior Pastor, Westminster Presbyterian Church,  
Buffalo NY





June 14, 2010

Dear Commissioners:

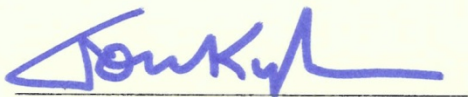
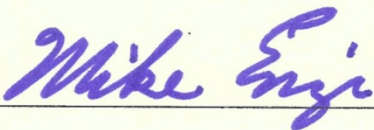
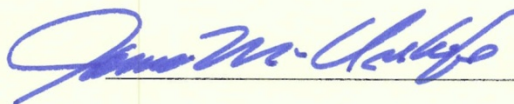
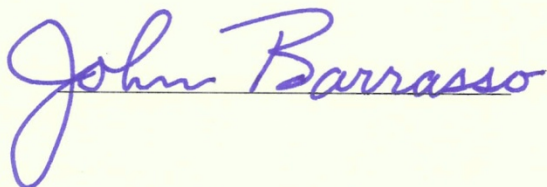
We understand that the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly will consider several initiatives relating to the Presbyterian Church's role in the Middle East and the relationship between the U.S. government and Israel. In addition to several proposed resolutions on this subject, we understand the General Assembly will consider the recommendations of the Middle East Study Committee (MESC).

As members of the Presbyterian Church (USA), we are deeply concerned about these recommendations and strongly counsel against their approval. The MESC report mischaracterizes the state of affairs in the Middle East and its recommendations, which appear to call for the PCUSA to join the boycott and divestment movement against Israel and support the suspension of U.S. military assistance to Israel, could damage U.S. interests and undermine the fragile Middle East peace process.

The United States has long emphasized the so-called "Quartet Principles," which require the Palestinian groups to accept Israel's right to exist, renounce violence, and accept past agreements with Israel, as a basis for meaningful peace negotiations. We support these principles and believe that without their implementation by both sides to the conflict, a stable and lasting peace is unlikely to be achieved. Pressuring Israel, the only democratic party in this process, will not speed the acceptance of the Quartet Principles among Israel's enemies.

As members of the U.S. Congress and the PCUSA, we urge you to exercise prudence in dealing with a matter as complex as the conflict in the Middle East.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Tom Kyr, written in a cursive style, positioned above a horizontal line.A blue ink signature of L. A. Bond, written in a cursive style, positioned above a horizontal line.A blue ink signature of Mike Enzi, written in a cursive style, positioned above a horizontal line.A blue ink signature of Jim McChesney, written in a cursive style, positioned above a horizontal line.A blue ink signature of John Barrasso, written in a cursive style, positioned above a horizontal line.





Presbyterian/Jewish Dialogue  
1110 Lovett Blvd. Houston, TX 77006 (713) 526-2585

## **The Middle East Study Committee Report: A Response and Recommendation**

May 7, 2010

Dear Commissioners to the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly,

Imagine, if you will, that Jewish leaders decided to do a comprehensive study of Presbyterianism in the United States. Imagine further that the study group met with numerous members of New Wineskins, The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America and the Orthodox Presbyterian church while meeting with only a handful of PC (U.S.A.) leaders. Such a report which largely ignores the mainstream Presbyterian denomination would be unbalanced and perhaps offensive to those of us who are proudly PC (U.S.A.).

Hurt, anger, confusion, betrayal are only a few of the emotions that have surfaced among Jews with the publication of the Middle East Study Committee report; a report that largely ignored mainstream Jewish organizations. Although the publication of the report has strained the relationship between Presbyterians and Jews, we believe that receiving and/or endorsing the MESC report will cause irreparable damage to the goodwill and trust that currently exist between Jews and Presbyterians in the communities served by our congregations.

The Presbyterian/Jewish Dialogue group in the greater Houston area has been a blessing to all involved and has led to in-depth dialogue and faith sharing. Pastors and Rabbis regularly exchange pulpits and leaders of each faith are welcomed at Presbytery meetings and Jewish organization meetings. We've traveled to Israel together, celebrated Passover and the Feast of Booths, and have explored the context of our faith together as sisters and brothers of a wondrous God. We fear for these precious relationships if the General Assembly even receives the MESC report in its present form. We fear the loss of trust, the loss of relationships and the loss of connection with our heritage.

This response to the report is not meant to be a defense of Israel's actions, but a plea to bring a balance and a fuller understanding of the situation in the Middle East. Our group concurs that there have been and continue to be many issues of injustice on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unfortunately, this report has focused primarily on only one of the two "narratives" (pg. 57) that it acknowledges exists. Although there are many specific areas of imbalance in the report, including the sheer number of pages (76) devoted to the Palestinian narrative versus the number of pages (8) devoted to the Israeli narrative, the following are three of the most egregious examples.



**1) The report undermines the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state, which is a central focus of Judaism and the Old Testament.**

- It questions whether Israel should be a Jewish state (pg.112) while the United States clearly continues to affirm Israel as a Jewish state.
- It does not acknowledge that Israel is a small democratic nation with a population of 7.5 million (1.5 million Israeli-Arabs) in the midst of hundreds of millions of Arabs and Muslims, many of whose governments have declared that Israel should not exist and that Jews should be eliminated.
- It does not mention that 95 percent of terrorist attacks on civilians by suicide bombers have been stopped by the security barrier. Having visited Israel as a group in 2005, we also understand that this security barrier has caused suffering to Palestinians who have been separated from family and their land.

**2) The report does not hold the Palestinian “government” (pg. 21) to the same standards as the Israeli government.**

- It did not discuss why the Palestinian government has done little for the Palestinian people to improve their infrastructure or their economy.
- The report makes several assumptions about the motivation of the Israeli government (pgs. 93, 111), but does not make similar assumptions about the Palestinian Authority.
- The report does not acknowledge that many Jews have worked with Palestinians to improve the infrastructure. We believe that where economic situations have improved, extremism has lessened.
- The report doesn't recognize that the Palestinian educational system continues to teach young Muslims that Jews and the West are evil and should be eradicated.
- The report is virtually silent on Palestinian terrorism, that there are two conflicting Palestinian “governments” (one of which is considered a terrorist regime by the U.S. government).

**3) The report is detrimental to efforts for peace through its bias in language and terminology.**

- It acknowledges that the War of 1948 is called the War of Independence in Israel and the Nakba by the Palestinians, yet it is solely referred to as the “Nakba,” which translates as “The Catastrophe,” throughout the report.
- The report compares the genocide of the Jews during the Holocaust to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. It is not morally sustainable to compare a regime that nearly succeeded in eradicating Jews from Europe to the current conflict between Israelis and the Palestinians.
- The report suggests on page 5 that they could find no mainstream Jewish community or national organization prepared to work together for a just and secure Israel. The statement in itself is not true and especially inflammatory.
- The report calls for an “end to the occupation,” but it never defines what “occupation” means, and its continual usage reveals the bias of the MESC.



- It calls for a Palestinian right of return in such numbers that Israel would no longer exist as a Jewish state. We advocate for some other form of compensation or alternate solution.

Our group and the U.S. government continue to endorse a two-state solution. We want to promote peace and viability for both groups without adding to the rhetoric that undermines peace. In the Holy Land where Jesus taught the power of love and justice, Christians are not forgotten. We thank God for their continued witness. We pray that the Palestinian and Israeli leaders will work for peace for the sake of all of the people.

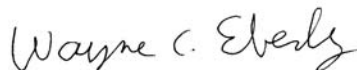
Our frank assessment of the MESC report is that it will do far more harm in our own communities than good in the Middle East. Interfaith relationships in our communities will be set back and perhaps irrevocably broken. Leaders of other faiths may be left wondering if they are next to be disrespected by the PC (U.S.A.). This report demonstrates a lack of sensitivity to the complexity of relationships and understandings within our faith communities in the United States and to the events transpiring in the Middle East.

We recognize the hard work the MESC has put in on this report and respect those who stand up for what they believe. However, the report is not balanced enough to be studied seriously in our congregations. Thus, we recommend that the General Assembly Middle East Peacemaking Issues Committee disapprove Part One and Part Three of the report. It is also our recommendation that Part Two of the report be disapproved because the recommendations of the MESC are based upon an imbalanced report.

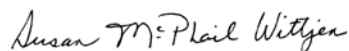
In Christ's love,



Rev. Mike Cole, General Presbyter,  
Presbytery of New Covenant (PNC)



Rev. Wayne Eberly, Former Moderator of  
PNC, Pines Presbyterian Church, Houston,  
TX



Dr. Susan McPhail Wittjen, Former  
Moderator of PNC, LaMarque Presbyterian  
Church, LaMarque, TX



Rev. Helen DeLeon, Associate Pastor,  
Webster Presbyterian Church, Webster, TX



Rev. Nora Fitch, Pastor, First Presbyterian  
Church, Angleton, TX



June 14, 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are writing as a group of pastors who share a common concern for the work before you as a commissioner member of Committee 14. We know that each of you, whether Advisory Delegate, Elder or Minister Commissioner, undertakes your responsibility desiring to seek the mind of Christ, and wanting to do so in a way that is just and fair through a process that is decent and orderly. The method by which your committee considers items of business and makes its decisions is vitally important to this outcome. The structure of your committee's agenda itself will have an enormous impact on what you decide. Your committee's decisions will influence the actions of the entire assembly. The importance of process is one of the reasons Presbyterians insist things be done "decently and in order."

We ask you to look closely at the committee schedule proposed by staff and committee leaders. That schedule will greatly influence your decision making as a committee. As we have examined it, it appears egregiously skewed to privilege a single perspective on the issues you will be considering. For example, prior to giving you, as an advisory delegate or commissioner member any opportunity to weigh in on the issues, the agenda currently includes:

- 15 minutes of introduction to the special committee's material with no time allotted for differing perspectives
- 15 minutes of MRTI presenting its case against Caterpillar Corporation with no time allotted for differing perspectives
- 30 minutes for the Middle East Study Committee (MESC) members to tell their stories and views about the Middle East with no time allotted for differing perspectives
- 35 minutes for small group discussion of the study committee's presentation (presumably members of the MESC will be in the small groups but not others with differing perspectives)
- 90 minutes of open hearings, at least half of which is required to comment positively on the MRTI and MESC recommendations
- 30 additional minutes from the MESC to present its case
- 30 minutes devoted to hearing from overture advocates; 25 minutes of which will be devoted to five overtures highly critical of Israel; only 5 minutes for Overture 14-06, the only overture which presents an alternative to the MESC's recommendations

If your committee adopts this proposed agenda, then apart from testimony and discussions, you will be subject to nearly two hours of one-sided, uncontested, anti-Israeli messages, compared to the five minutes of counter argument favoring evenhanded treatment of Palestinians and Israelis. In short, at a minimum, almost 90% of the committee's instruction would be devoted to one perspective!

If, upon further reflection, you see how one-sided and unfair this schedule is, you can propose an amended schedule to your committee. You can work with your committee moderator to cut down on the presentation time in favor of certain items and add in equal presentation time in opposition. Your committee leadership has a major responsibility placed in their hands by the Manual of the General Assembly, which states unequivocally that "The committee moderator **shall** provide that the total time allotted to persons, other than members of the committee, who speak for or against a recommendation be equal so far as possible." (E.2.e.(8)).

As you consider the proposed schedule, please ask yourself the following questions. As currently designed, does this process reflect something that is done “decently and in order?” Does this agenda follow the Presbyterian principles of giving equal attention to both sides of an issue? We don’t think any fair minded person can respond “yes” to these questions.

What can you do about this unfair process? You have both the authority and responsibility to change it. It is your committee. Your committee leadership has an important responsibility to guide and ensure a fair process for the business before your committee. It is not their responsibility to dictate the agenda to suit any group, including the authors of the Middle East Study Committee’s report. You, the members of the committee ultimately determine the agenda. We encourage you to work together with other fair-minded commissioners to ensure that a full range of information is presented for your consideration. Your opportunity to do this comes right at the start of your committee work, so you will need to be alert and prepared. It is your committee. You create the agenda, not MRTI, MESC, or even Committee 14’s leadership.

Thank you for considering our request. We hope that you will ensure the adoption of a process that is worthy of our tradition of discerning God’s will on issues in a manner that is just and fair, and done “decently and in order.”

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Jack Baca – Senior Pastor  
\*Village Community Presbyterian Church  
Rancho Santa Fe, CA

Rev. Dr. Mark Brewer – Senior Pastor  
\*Bel Air Presbyterian Church  
Los Angeles, CA

Rev. John Gable – Senior Pastor  
\*Tabernacle Presbyterian Church  
Indianapolis, IN

Rev. Dr. Bob Henley – Senior Pastor  
\*Presbyterian Church of the Big Wood  
Ketchum, ID

Rev. Dr. Edwin Hurley – Senior Pastor  
\*South Highland Presbyterian Church  
Birmingham, AL

Rev. Richard McDermott – Senior Pastor  
\*First Presbyterian Church  
Fort Collins, CO

Rev. Dr. Mark Patterson – Senior Pastor  
\*Community Presbyterian Church  
Ventura, CA

Rev. Dr. David Stoker – Executive Pastor  
\*First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu  
Honolulu, HI

Rev. Dr. Jim Birchfield – Senior Pastor  
\*First Presbyterian Church  
Houston, TX

Rev. Dr. Dennis Falasco – Senior Pastor  
\*First Presbyterian Church  
Idaho Falls, ID

Rev. Paul Gaug – Senior Pastor  
\*Brookdale Presbyterian Church  
St. Joseph, MO

Rev. Jeff Hosmer – Senior Pastor  
\*Northminster Presbyterian Church  
Cincinnati, OH

Rev. Dr. Steven Marsh – Senior Pastor  
\*Eastminster Presbyterian Church  
Wichita, KS

Rev. Glenn McDonald – Senior Pastor  
\*Zionsville Presbyterian Church  
Zionsville, IN

Rev. Calvin Reynolds – Senior Pastor  
\*San Pedro Presbyterian Church  
San Antonio, TX

Rev. Dr. Paul Watermulder  
\*First Presbyterian Church  
Burlingame, CA

\* Congregation listed for purposes of identification only



June 11, 2010

Dear Commissioner to the Presbyterian Church (USA) 2010 General Assembly:

For twenty-three years, the Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies has advanced educational programming and research that disarms religious hostilities and improves interreligious relations. Because of our commitment to healing the wounds of millennia of religious conflict, the board and staff of the ICJS want to express our grave reservations about the Presbyterian Church's Middle East Study Committee report "Breaking Down the Walls."<sup>1</sup> While we share the report's authors' desires for peace in the region, we believe that the report undermines hard-won achievements in Christian-Jewish relations over the last half-century and imperils future interfaith relations. Our concerns include the following:

- The report denounces Jews in sharply negative terms, evoking ingrained patterns of Christian anti-Jewish stereotypes. For example, Jews are said to be duplicitous (engaged in a "masterful manipulation of the United States political process"), bellicose (believing "the end justifies the means, even if that means the loss of human rights"), and ethnocentric and indifferent to non-Jews (despite the lessons of the Holocaust, they are "oppressing and destroying others"). They are even likened to the Nazis.<sup>2</sup>
- The report uses biblical and Jewish traditions selectively, almost always to criticize Israeli and American Jews as disobedient to God. The report presents biblical passages threatening God's punishment of the Jews while ignoring passages describing God's enduring covenant and celebrating Jewish life in the land of Israel.<sup>3</sup>
- The authors envision themselves as modern-day Christian "prophets" sent to rebuke Jews for "violating God's commandments." This stance distorts the traditional prophetic vocation of one who is sent by God to both rebuke and reassure one's own people. This distortion recalls centuries of Christian attacks on Jews that they misunderstood or disobeyed their own Scriptures.<sup>4</sup>
- The report rebukes mainstream American Jews without even engaging them, contradicting the Presbyterian Church's repeated commitments to "mutual understanding and dialogue" with Jews.<sup>5</sup>

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has polarized Jews, Christians, and Muslims for decades. Peacemaking depends on interfaith cooperation and trust, and we applaud the authors' stated commitments to advance these values. However, the report does not fulfill its best intentions. We are deeply dismayed that the report transforms debatable political critiques of Israeli policies into theological distortions and denunciations. We respectfully ask that the Church substantially revise the report or reject it in its current form.

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Notes: 1. [www.pcusa.org/middleeastpeace/pdf/middleeastpeace-fullreport.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/middleeastpeace/pdf/middleeastpeace-fullreport.pdf) 2. Pages 41, 31, 32, 39 3. Pages 14-15, 41 4. Pages 1-3, 21 5. Page 5; [www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/ga217response.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resources/ga217response.pdf)





## BREAKING DOWN THE WALLS: A CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE

The National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel (NCLCI) was founded in 1978 to develop, encourage and strengthen understanding and support for the people, land and State of Israel within the North American Christian community. NCLCI is a broad-based network of Christian leaders – Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical and independent – whose goal is advocacy for Israel, dialogue and mutual respect in a non-proselytizing spirit. The following statement was issued at its May 2010 Executive Committee meeting in Minneapolis.

Beginning in the 1960s, mainline Protestant denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (USA), began to engage in constructive dialogue that profoundly altered the Christian-Jewish relationship from misunderstanding and antagonism to one of growing understanding and respect. This dialogue led to the adoption of theological positions that acknowledged and repented of views that denied God's ongoing covenant with the Jewish people and fostered antisemitism.

Unfortunately, recent proposals considered by some major church bodies are now threatening to undermine authentic dialogue and mutual Christian-Jewish understanding. If implemented, these proposals pose a real threat to the security and integrity of Israel and Jewish peoplehood; the credibility of our churches; and the long-range prosperity, security and independence of the Palestinian people.

Specifically, a number of proposals found in the PCUSA Middle East Task Force report, *Breaking Down the Walls*, contain serious flaws that would cause great harm.

These include:

- Alluding to democratic Israel as an apartheid state – an unjust and toxic slur. Such language ignores the broad diversity of peoples and nationalities whose human and civil rights and opportunities are guaranteed by Israeli law. At the same time this charge demeans the tragic and inhumane suffering of South Africans under apartheid.
- Highlighting the “occupation” as the root cause of the conflict in Israel/Palestine and in the region, while minimizing the constant threat of terror and Arab rejection of a Jewish State in the Middle East. In the process Israel's repeated and well-documented willingness to offer major concessions for peace is ignored.
- Recommending for study by the entire denomination the Kairos Palestine document of December 11, 2009, that would effectively end the viability of the Jewish homeland in Israel, calling for divestment and economic boycott as well as an open return of all Palestinian refugees.

- Calling for an immediate cessation of the “blockade” of Gaza without specifying how the flow of weapons being used against Israel would cease, and ignoring positive Israeli actions such as providing a steady flow of food and medical supplies into Gaza on a daily basis and enabling Gaza produce to reach international markets.
- Supporting the establishment of “an international council” for Jerusalem, an arrangement that has never worked in any other venue where it has been tried, i.e. Berlin, Danzig, Trieste and others.

We urge the Presbyterian General Assembly to recognize the complexity of these issues; to reject the highly flawed report of the Middle East Study Committee, *Breaking Down the Walls*; and to maintain the balanced and sensitive approach to reconciliation that have informed and guided the church’s best decisions in the past.





## **Presbyterian Church (USA) Middle East Study Committee Report**

*Overview:* The Jewish community is profoundly concerned about matters that will come before the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly in July 2010, including an imbalanced and factually flawed Middle East Study Committee (MESC) report, a call to denounce a company for its sales to Israel, and endorsement of the anti-Israel Kairos Palestine document. These actions could extinguish the already flickering hope for positive Jewish-Presbyterian relations. A proposed document on Christian-Jewish relations could make a constructive contribution, but it would not make up for the damage that would be done by the other proposed actions.

### **Middle East Study Committee report:**

- The MESC report makes highly selective use of sacred texts, historical events, and current realities to build an egregious narrative against the Jewish state.
- The MESC report's recommendations are extremely biased against Israel. More than a dozen demands are placed on Israel and the United States for policies supporting Israel. The few recommendations for Palestinian reforms are generally paired with additional demands on Israel.

### **MESC Process Was Troubling:**

- While the nine-person MESC was supposed to represent a diverse range of perspectives, it did not. One member of the committee resigned in protest of the anti-Israel imbalance, noting that much of the committee, and those it sought to consult, were squarely aligned with an anti-Israel narrative.

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## **MESC Report Is Insulting to the Mainstream Jewish Community**

- MESC admonishes the mainstream American Jewish community to “catch up” with American Jewish groups of which it approves, namely Jewish Voices for Peace, B’Tselem, and J Street. The MESC met only briefly with one American representative of a mainstream Jewish organization. J Street issued a statement that it was never consulted by the MESC, finds the MESC report troubling and unfair, strongly objects to the MESC findings, and is dismayed that the MESC used J Street as “political cover” for the report. Had the MESC opened itself to a meaningful dialogue with the mainstream American Jewish community, it might have learned that most mainstream Jewish groups, like most American Jews, are deeply committed to Israeli-Palestinian peace including a two-state solution. Jewish Voices for Peace is a group far outside the mainstream that does not endorse a two-state solution and that welcomes anti-Zionist Jews. B’Tselem is not an American group.
- The MESC letter to the Jewish community dismisses as a semantic misunderstanding deep Jewish concerns about the PCUSA path to divestment. Consultation with the Jewish community might have helped avoid such a serious misunderstanding.

## **MESC Presents a Problematic Theology:**

- The report states 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.’” The MESC negates biblical claims the Jewish people might use to build a modern state in the land. But at the same time, the report conflates modern and biblical, lifting dozen of verses to assign obligations to the modern state that we never see applied to other countries. If sacred texts cannot be used to justify this modern state alone, should they be used to condemn this modern state alone?
- Holding Israel to biblical standards permits use of words like “sinful” and “evil” to judge the actions of a modern state defending itself against modern threats. That is where criticism can stop and demonization can begin.

## **MESC Endorses Anti-Israel Screech:**

- Under the pretense of hope and love, Kairos Palestine demonizes Israel and calls for boycott, divestment, and sanction of Israel. Kairos uses the word “evil” 29 times, as many times as the word “peace.” Kairos also uses arguably supersessionist language, such as calling a “dead letter” the “promises, the election, the people of God and the land” in the “Old Testament.”
- Kairos Palestine terms Palestinian terror as part of “legal resistance.” Kairos dismisses any Palestinian culpability for the conflict, noting “if there were no occupation, there would be no ‘resistance.’” Kairos ignores the existential threats to Israel that preceded the 1967 war and that are still exemplified by the Hamas charter which calls for Israel’s destruction.
- The MESC defense that its endorsement of Kairos Palestine is based upon “its emphases on hope for liberation, nonviolence, love of enemy, and reconciliation” is frightening in its complete lack of criticism of Kairos’ many excesses.

## **MESC Punishes Caterpillar For Refusing to Violate U.S. Law:**

- The PCUSA singles out one company, Caterpillar, for selling to its dealers in Israel. The company has said that it is subject to strict anti-boycott requirements under American Law – and could face severe civil and criminal penalties for participating in an anti-Israel boycott. The PCUSA would punish a company for refusing to participate in a boycott that the company has been advised would be illegal.

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- Perhaps, by denouncing a company, the PCUSA seeks to shield itself from the criticism it knows would be attendant to a call for divestment. The proposed action is still one-sided, unfair, and cannot be viewed as anything but support for the broader boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement.
- It is notable that the PCUSA has not done a thorough investigation of its assets invested in companies responsible for violence against Israel, such as those operating in Iran or Syria. The only PCUSA engagement with a company responsible for harming Israelis was cursory, based on a five-year old Wall Street Journal article. The matter was dropped because the company, a bank, had already changed its procedures.

#### **MESC Suggests Withholding Foreign Aid:**

- The MESC suggests withholding U.S. aid to Israel until Israel is “in compliance with international law and peacemaking efforts.” The MESC makes no analogous call to link Palestinian aid to Palestinian reforms. In discussing aid, the report uses an offensive tactic of referring to anti-Israel Jews when it quotes an unnamed Jewish critic of Israel who suggests redirecting aid to resettle Palestinian refugees in Israel.

#### **MESC Avoids Support for Israel as a Jewish Homeland:**

- The report professes support for Israel as a “home” for the Jews. The word “homeland” is avoided. However, “homeland” is used six times referring to Palestinian and Christian attachment to the land. The one time the “homeland” is used referring to Jews, it is conditional.
- According to a footnote, PCUSA recognition of Israel is a “source of pain” for some on the MESC.

#### **MESC Distorts Middle East History:**

- When discussing history, through scores of critical omissions, the MESC report glosses over current anti-Israel aggression and war-mongering against Israel throughout history. It ignores the oppression of the Jewish people by the Byzantine Christians. It describes Palestinian refugees from 1948, but fails to acknowledge Jewish refugees expelled from Arab lands in the same war. One author distorts history to describe “the 1948 invasion of Palestine by Israeli soldiers.” It ignores the events leading to the 1967 war, and overlooks any Palestinian challenges to Christian identity during centuries of Muslim rule.

#### **MESC Blames Israel for Palestinian Terror against Israel:**

- The report blames Israel for the violence it endures. There is a complete failure to address pre-occupation Arab and Palestinian violence, rejectionism and aggression. It mistakenly claims, “If there were no occupation, there would be no Palestinian resistance. If there was no Palestinian resistance, Israelis could live in peace and security.”

#### **MESC blames Israel alone for Plight of Palestinian Christians:**

- Pointing at Israeli “discrimination” and “occupation” as the primary if not the exclusive cause for a decrease in the Christian population, the report ironically acknowledges the actual Christian population has “remained steady, or may have even increased slightly.” It is the percentage of Christians that has dropped – in part because Christians have a lower birth rate.

***The PCUSA states that it views its role as one of reconciliation.***

***Adoption of the adversarial MESC report is entirely inconsistent with this role.***





### J Street troubled by Presbyterian Church Report

*Rachel Lerner, Associate Executive Director of the J Street Education Fund, issued the following statement today in response to the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s "Breaking Down The Walls" report:*

J Street is troubled by "Breaking Down The Walls," a recent report from the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s Middle East Study Committee. We were particularly surprised to find J Street's name mentioned in the report's "Letter to our American Jewish friends."

J Street was never approached by the Committee, nor have we had any conversations with PC (USA)'s leadership about this or any other study.

We wish more groups, including J Street, were consulted on this document before its publication and that we had been able to relay our strong objections to many of its findings. We are dismayed at the attempt by the Committee to use J Street as political cover for this report.

While we appreciate the Church's stated desire to achieve peace in the region, and while we do agree with some parts of the study, we have serious disagreements with the Committee's recommendations, particularly the call for the possible withholding of U.S. aid to Israel.

J Street believes that American assistance to Israel, including maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge, is an important anchor for a peace process based on providing Israel with the confidence and assurance to move forward on a solution based on land for peace.

Moreover, the study document consistently downplays Israel's very real security concerns, appears to shrug off any Palestinian responsibility for resolving the ongoing conflict, and underplays the Israeli narrative throughout. J Street firmly believes that both Israelis and Palestinians will have to do their part in taking the necessary steps toward achieving a two state solution.

Finally, the letter wrongly lists J Street with other organizations as if we share views and agendas – when in reality what we have in common is that we're Jewish organizations willing at times to criticize the policies of the government of Israel. To us that is unfair – a kind of stereotyping in its own right that we find distasteful. Had the Committee reached out to us, they might have better understood the important distinctions between us.

For these reasons and others, we sincerely hope that this document is not adopted by the Presbyterian Church (USA) in its current form.





**Statement on the 2010 Report of the Middle East Study Committee of the Presbyterian Church (USA)**

**Reform Rabbinic Leaders Decry Renewal of Anti-Israel Rhetoric from National Presbyterian Leadership**

In 2004, the American Jewish community was stunned when the Presbyterian Church (USA) took several harsh anti-Israel positions at its General Assembly. After long decades of positive, fruitful cooperation with the Presbyterian Church on both interfaith relations and a wide variety of social justice initiatives, Reform Rabbis who are members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis were shocked that no consultation or discussion with our community had preceded the adoption of these one-sided anti-Israel “Overtures,” which, among other things, called for “phased selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel.”

We came to find that we were not alone among those who were surprised by the national Presbyterian action. When we approached our Presbyterian friends and partners at the local level, seeking some understanding, we found that they, too, had been taken by surprise. We were delighted when, in one community after another, Presbyterian Churches and regional Presbyteries took formal positions opposing the General Assembly’s action. We were gratified when the Church’s 2006 General Assembly rescinded the negative language focused exclusively at Israel and called for “a new season of mutual understanding and dialogue.”

Reform Rabbis have longed shared with Presbyterians and other Christians a deep concern for the welfare of the Palestinian people, unmitigated by our shared commitment to a secure, Jewish State of Israel. Together, we have advocated for a two-state solution to the problem of a Jewish State beset by enemies and a Palestinian people living under conditions none of us would accept. Reform Rabbis, Presbyterian clergy and both Jewish and Presbyterian lay people broke new ground in the aftermath of the deplorable 2004 action of the national Church, increasing our dialogue, shared study, and joint action.

In recent months, though, we have become increasingly concerned. We have been aware of the work of the Church’s Middle East Study Committee. The composition of the Study Committee worried us, with a majority known to be most unsympathetic to Israel. We were further dismayed when a notable and progressive member, Rev. John Wimberly, resigned from the Study Committee, citing the majority’s anti-Israel bias. Pledges made in the aftermath of the 2004 debacle, that future initiatives would include significant dialogue with American Jewish leaders, were ignored by the Study Committee.

Now, we have read and studied the Study Committee’s Report. Our fears prove warranted. The Report is an egregious anti-Israel diatribe, making selective use of facts and a selective reading

of history to build a case against Israel and to erase almost 1900 years of Jewish presence in and connection to the Land of Israel. The Study strikes an arrogant posture, presuming to tell the American Jewish community how we should approach our own brothers and sisters in Israel. The Report endorses a document known as “*Kairos / A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*,” a declaration by a small group of Palestinian Christian leaders which delegitimizes Israel, echoes in supersessionist theology, and while promoting non-violent resistance, ultimately justifies terrorism aimed at Israel. The Report is more troubling even than the 2004 divestment Overture, now suggesting an end to U.S. aid to Israel, striking at the core of the unique bond between the United States and Israel. The Report’s use of classical anti-Jewish themes is reprehensible and contradicts the Church’s own 1987 document, “A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews,” as well as a praiseworthy 2010 Overture, entitled, “Christians and Jews: People of God.”

In the two months between now and the beginning of this summer’s General Assembly, Reform Rabbis will be talking with our local Presbyterian colleagues and friends. We will engage in a dialogue that the national Presbyterian Church (USA) and its Middle East Study Committee did not. We will read the Middle East Study Committee’s report together. We will explain that the Study Committee’s Report is insulting to us; indeed, that it brings us deep pain. We will pray that the local Presbyterians who convene in General Assembly in July will reject the Study Committee’s Report.

While the outcome at the General Assembly may severely impact relationships, Reform Rabbis who are members of the CCAR, the world’s largest organization of Jewish clergy, will struggle to find ways to continue our work with likeminded local Presbyterian clergy and friends to pursue our shared social justice mission, to further our interfaith dialogue and study, and to do our part to bring peace to the Middle East, to the Jewish State of Israel and to a hoped-for future Palestinian State; indeed, to all of God’s creation.

Rabbi Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus  
*President*

Rabbi Steven A. Fox  
*Chief Executive*

Central Conference of American Rabbis





**The Rabbinical Assembly** *The Worldwide Association of Conservative / Masorti Rabbis*

## **Resolution on the Presbyterian Church (USA) Middle East Study Committee Report**

Whereas at its upcoming convention in July of 2010, the Middle East Study Committee of the Presbyterian Church will present a report entitled, “Breaking Down the Walls” presenting its findings and perspectives on the Middle East;

Whereas experience in past dialogue with the Presbyterian Church, both on a national and local level, has shown that there are allies among Church leaders who articulate tremendous support for Israel. The Rabbinical Assembly appreciates and takes note of their support;

Whereas the Rabbinical Assembly posits that this report is seriously biased and flawed in that it:

- Makes numerous derogatory references to “the occupation” without recognizing that the areas in dispute were acquired by Israel after the defensive Six Day War and Israel has agreed to give back 97% of that land in the aftermath of the 1999 Camp David Accords;
- Places the blame for Palestinian violence on Israel’s “occupation of Arab lands” without adequately recognizing the role played by Arab incitement in the ongoing conflict; and
- Endorses the Kairos Document, a one-sided perspective that places the full blame for the conflict on Israel and rejects the notion of a two-state solution, while deeming Palestinian violence as “legal resistance”.

Therefore be it resolved that the Rabbinical Assembly call upon the Presbyterian Church to reject this document and to repudiate and disassociate itself from this effort;

Be it further resolved that the Rabbinical Assembly call upon its members to become familiar with this document and to reach out in dialogue to our Presbyterian colleagues as well as bringing up this issue at meetings of local ministeria and communicate our opposition and concern with this report; and

Be it further resolved that the Rabbinical Assembly partner with other Jewish organizations and allies in the Presbyterian Church to advocate for a more balanced approach and to be a visible presence when this issue is considered at the 219<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church General Assembly in July, 2010.



## Resolution on the Presbyterian Church (USA) Middle East Study Committee Report

### United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism Resolution on the Presbyterian Church USA Middle East Study Committee Report

*Approved at June 6, 2010 General Assembly*

**Whereas** Jews and Presbyterians in the United States have cooperated in joint advocacy on many social issues and we wish to further that productive relationship; and

**Whereas** the Presbyterian Church USA at its General Assembly in July 2010 will consider a report of its Middle East Study Committee (MESC) which if adopted would damage the relationship between our communities; and

**Whereas** the report is distinctly one-sided, traffics in troubling theology, distorts history; and

**Whereas** we determine that the report specifically:

1. Misrepresents Jewish history when it indicates that there is no scientific evidence that contemporary Jews are linked to their ancestral home in Palestine;
2. Describes Israel as the occupying army and the major impediment to peace without acknowledging that the Israeli government has the ethical imperative to defend its citizens from terrorist infiltration;
3. Considers the settlements as the obstacle to peace without recognizing that there has been longstanding hostility to Israel predating the defensive 1967 War;
4. and praises the Kairos Palestinian document, ignoring its virulently anti-Israel content. The Kairos document employs retrograde theology that has been rejected by most Christians as supersessionist. It refers to Palestinian terror as "legal resistance," and calls for boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel; and

**Whereas** we believe that the Middle East conflict can be resolved with the kind of two-state solution that is promoted by moderates in Israel and among the Palestinian leadership and has been endorsed by most world leaders and the United Nations; and

**Whereas** we further affirm that it is important for both sides of the conflict to recall that the United Nations recognized the State of Israel in 1948 and the government of Israel has recognized the rights of Palestinians to a state of their own. Israel will defend its citizens against terrorist attacks and provide for their security. It is a tragic consequence of this conflict that innocent people on both sides continue to suffer; and

**Whereas** our friends and colleagues in the Presbyterian Church should understand that slander of the State of Israel will be felt deeply in the American Jewish community;

**Therefore be it resolved** that the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism urge our rabbis and congregational leaders to familiarize themselves with the content of the MESC report. They should approach their Presbyterian colleagues and specifically delegates to the July General Assembly and advocate for the defeat of that report. Towards that end, the USCJ will provide our regional leadership with names and contact information for local delegates.