

Presbyterians for Middle East Peace Overture Guide
222nd Presbyterian General Assembly

Summary

The PFMEP overture recommendations are based on our commitment to constructive peacemaking and our rejection of the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Most of the business before the Middle East Issues committee is based on a coordinated BDS campaign to delegitimize and weaken the State of Israel. BDS neither contributes to peace nor improves the welfare of the Palestinian people.

Several of the overtures also contain serious and hateful accusations of Israeli human rights violations, examples being accusations that Israel has widely established practices of torturing Palestinian children and hindering Palestinian access to water. These are allegations that are intensely disputed by Israelis, and accusations that the General Assembly has no ability to independently and objectively investigate or verify. The BDS movement has a dismal record of truth and accuracy. Should the General Assembly stand behind accusations that turn out to be false, it will have become an unwitting participant in a coordinated and international hate campaign.

Recommendations: Middle East Issues Committee Business

[08:06] ACSWP report *Israel-Palestine: For Human Values in the absence of a Just Peace*

We have serious concerns regarding the factual accuracy of this paper and strongly disagree with many of its recommendations. The report did not perform its assigned task from the 2014 GA, namely, to analyze the Two State Position of the denomination. It instead pursued a process of questionable research and inaccurate presentation of history, leading to a very one-sided assessment of the situation that is more in line with the radical elements of the BDS community than the membership of PCUSA. We urge the denomination to distance itself from this report in the same way it distanced itself from Zionism Unsettled and the BDS movement overall.

We have published a rebuttal to this paper which is [available on the PFMEP website](#). We recommend that the Assembly receive the ACSWP paper as solely the viewpoint and opinions of its authors, and that that Assembly states clearly that it neither endorses nor approves its content and recommendations.

[08:07] On Prayerfully Considering the Palestinian Civil Society Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions.

We recommend disapproval of this overture. Since its inception, the BDS Movement has been supported by a supercessionist and anti-Semitic theology that identifies all

forms of Zionism with racism. The BDS Movement seeks to be identified with such movements as Martin Luther King's Civil Rights movement or Gandhi's movement for Indian independence. However, BDS seeks more to eliminate dialogue than it does to promote reconciliation. Its opposition to economic cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis builds walls instead of bridges. Recently, the United Methodist Church gave voice to this reality and cut ties to the End the Occupation Movement which is a major US partner with the BDS Movement.

[08:01] Boycott of HP

We recommend disapproval of this overture [08-01]. Proposing a boycott of HP actually would run counter to the desire of reconciliation, which is at the heart of the Gospel message. Besides the fact that the overture attacks Israel's right to protect its citizens, the HP technology used by the Israeli security forces actually assists in allowing the movement of Palestinians from the occupied territories into Israel for employment, healthcare, etc. It also provides for the development of interactions and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. To remove this technology removes this freedom of movement.

In addition, HP's largest contract in Israel, by far, is with the Health Ministry. This contract affords technology and information to be used in hospitals in the region to care for both Palestinians and Israelis. Hospitals in Israel are one of the places where Palestinians and Israelis work side by side to care for one another, to hinder this work is not only counterproductive but further leads to isolation of the two groups.

This overture is also part of a coordinated international BDS campaign, and approval would be seen by the world as PC(USA) alignment with BDS. Boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) have not encouraged peace. Instead they have led to a hardening of positions between Israelis and Palestinians as well as empowering extremists on both sides. “

[08:04] On calling for REMAX Corporation to cease selling properties in West Bank settlements.

We recommend disapproval of this overture. The overture incites economic warfare between Palestinians and Israelis, with Palestinians standing to suffer much more severely than Israelis. REMAX employs both Jews and Arabs in Israel and affords a parity in living wage. Considering the disparity in the society overall in earnings by Jews and Arabs, to sanction a business that is seeking to close that disparity does not meet the goal of reconciliation.

The overture also fails to recognize that final negotiations on borders are quite likely to leave several of the largest Israeli communities adjacent to Jerusalem within the borders of Israel. The status of other Jewish communities in the West Bank is also subject to final negotiation.

This overture therefore promotes an economic pressure campaign with no clearly stated purpose. Is the purpose to pressure all Jewish residents living east of the 1948 “Green Line” to leave? If so, no past Presbyterian GA has taken such a position, which could be seen as an endorsement of ethnic cleansing.

[08:02] On Advocating for the Safety and Well-being for the Children of Israel and Palestine.

We recommend disapproval of this overture. While we support affirmation of the rights and protections of children, this overture asks Presbyterians to stand behind some extremely harsh accusations. “Presbyterians everywhere” are asked to “communicate their concern for the safety and well-being of the children of Palestine who suffer widespread and systematic patterns of ill treatment and torture within the Israeli military detention system”. These are serious allegations that are intensely disputed by Israelis and that the General Assembly has no ability to independently investigate and verify.

It is true that Palestinian minors are subject to the Israeli military court system, which provides fewer protections than civil courts. At the same time progress is being made on legitimate Palestinian grievances. The UN issued a statement in 2014 which commends Israel for making progress on this issue. Furthermore, UNICEF describes its dialogue with the government of the State of Israel as “productive” on the same issues.

The overture does not give any voice to a rising group of voices among Palestinian journalists and intellectuals who are pointing out the dangerous incitement that the PA and other groups within Palestine are fostering to encourage children to take up violence.

The overture also fails to provide for the safety of the children of Israel who time and again are forced to live in fear of missile and terrorist attacks. A new generation of Israeli children are suffering from PTSD, but the overture, which claims to advocate for the children of Palestine *and Israel*, is silent on this issue.

(note: the term ‘children’ can be confusing here. In the U.S. legal system a child is generally someone under the age of 14, while older young people are referred to as “minors” or “juveniles”. In other parts of the world anyone under the age of 18 is considered a child. Only about 1% of the juveniles in Israeli detention would be considered “children” in the U.S. legal system)

[08:03] On Upholding Peoples and Partners in the Middle East and the United States

PFMEP recommends approval of this overture, which supports Christians and churches in the Middle East and their continued presence. We support the call for peace-building, development of institutions nurturing civil society, and broadly inclusive economic development. These are the same principles we see as critical to ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Concern, however, needs to be given to final language that also recognizes the other faith traditions of the region. In particular, the Atlanta Statement which is referenced by OGA in support of the overture contains language that time and again refers only to the "Holy Land." Should we not be affirming both the Holy Land and the State of Israel?

Overtures outside of Middle East Issues Committee

[12:05] On Affirming Non-violent Means to Resistance of Oppression

We recommend disapproval of this overture. While recognizing that boycotts, sanctions and divestment can be tools to address oppressive practices of nations and businesses, it is clear that this overture has one purpose and that is to lend legitimacy to the BDS Movement, which the denomination repudiated at the 221st GA. This overture can be seen as a very cynical attempt of radical BDS supporters to sneak in the back door. Much like PFMEP's stance against 8:7, again we reject the BDS Movement. Let us follow the wise decision of the United Methodist Church, which distanced itself from BDS in May.

[11:04] On Supporting the United Nations Commission on Human Rights

PFMEP recommends approval of this overture calling for the need of all, regardless of sexual orientation, to have fair access to legal protections and opportunity. However, we also recommend amending this overture to condemn the execution of members of the LGBT community by Palestinian leadership in Gaza, and the execution of LGBT people in other Middle Eastern countries.