



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

GRADYE M. PARSONS

STATED CLERK August 4, 2011

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister's Office
3 Kaplan St.
P.O.B. 187
Kiryat Ben-Gurion
Jerusalem 91919

Dear Prime Minister,

I write on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to express our deep concern about the Boycott Law recently passed by the Knesset. This law deals a severe blow to free speech and the freedoms of opinion and expression. While it does not provide for criminal charges against individuals or groups publicly calling for a boycott against Israel or any area under its control, it allows for civil suits claiming financial damages. This will have a dampening affect on freedom and democracy.

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by Israel in 1991, affirms the right to freedom of opinion and freedom of expression. In a recent commentary on these topics, the United Nations Human Rights Committee noted:

Freedom of opinion and freedom of expression are indispensable conditions for the full development of the person. They are essential for any society.¹ They constitute the foundation stone for every free and democratic society. The two freedoms are closely related, with freedom of expression providing the vehicle for the exchange and development of opinions. (¹Benhadj v. Algeria, No. 1173/2003; Tae-Hoon Park v. Republic of Korea, No. 628/1995.)

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has long affirmed and advocated for the value of the freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and freedom of opinion. Whether one agrees with a specific boycott, there can be no doubt that such nonviolent actions are internationally recognized practices. Boycotts have been used in the United States and in countries around the world. They are significant ways that people have expressed their freedom in democratic societies. I hope the Knesset will reconsider the Boycott Law.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), with its more than two million members, works both nationally and internationally with congregations, church organizations, and mission partners. I thank you in advance for considering this request.

Respectfully,

The Reverend Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly