

Just Peace



A Commissioner's Guide

A companion to a DVD provided by the members of the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the PC(USA) for the 218th General Assembly, San Jose, California, June

A Commissioner's Guide

Welcome

Setting the context for your participation in the 218th General Assembly

Front page



Our Case Statement

PC(USA) involvement in the Middle East and why we advocate for a just peace

Page 2



Our Theological Foundations

A framework to consider for participation at the General Assembly

Page 3

A Human Rights Lens

A talk by Jeff Halper, founder of ICAHD, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, and Nobel Peace Prize Nominee 2006

Page 4

What are Human Rights?

How do Human Rights affect the Israel/Palestine Conflict?

Page 5

A Prophetic Voice

Archbishop Desmond Tutu talks about siding with God in the

current conflict in Israel/Palestine

Page 6



Welcome

Dear Commissioner,

Congratulations on your election as a commissioner to the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA). You are soon to be engaged in an event which will push you to your spiritual, mental and physical limits as you join others in seeking to ascertain the will of God for our church in these difficult times.

The Israel/Palestine Mission Network (IPMN) was established by act of the 216th General Assembly (2004) and, at its first meeting, adopted the following vision statement: "In joyful obedience to the call of Christ, and in solidarity with churches and our other partners in Israel and Palestine, this Network covenants to engage, consolidate, nourish and channel the energy in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) toward the goal of a just peace in Israel and Palestine by facilitating education, promoting partnerships and coordinating advocacy." IPMN offers you this packet of materials for use in preparation for the challenging task that

lies before you. The materials are provided as a DVD and in hard copy. We hope you will take the time to read this summary of the materials included in the packet and then dig deeper into these materials for assistance in understanding a major issue that will be addressed during the General Assembly: where our church will stand with respect to issues of basic human rights.

Among other items in this packet are four basic essays.

First: Biblical and Theological Foundations: a framework to consider for your participation at General Assembly. This addresses our social context and Biblical and Theological guidance.

Second: The case for the continuing commitment of the IPMN and PCUSA to channel its efforts and resources in advocating for a just peace, with our long history of involvement.

Third: A speech given to IPMN in May of 2007 by Jeff Halper, a Jewish-American/Israeli Citizen and founder and Director

of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition (ICAHD). He reminds us of the long standing commitment of the American Jewish Community to human and civil rights and their considerable involvement in the passage of the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights. Halper contrasts this history with the State of Israel's current policy of occupation of Palestinian territory.

Fourth: Archbishop Desmond Tutu's address to the Boston Sabeel Conference, in support of a Palestinian ecumenical Christian liberation theology center in Jerusalem. This Nobel Peace Prize recipient - for his work against Apartheid in South Africa - and leader of the Reconciliation Commission speaks in the context of the current conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians about the importance of siding with the God who is portrayed in Hebrew scriptures as steadfastly taking the side of the oppressed and asking that our behavior exhibit mercy, justice and humility.

Peace be with you as you do God's work.



The Case for our Mission

A tragic irony of human history is that some descendants of the victims of the greatest modern crime against humanity, the Holocaust perpetrated against the Jews in Europe in World War II, are, in their quest for a secure homeland of their own, oppressing and taking the land and resources of people who were themselves innocent of that horrific crime. As a result of the establishment of the State of Israel and its subsequent policies and actions against the Palestinian people, some Palestinians and their Arab allies have waged wars against Israel and resorted to terrorizing attacks against Israeli civilians. And so the spiral of violence worsens and there is no security and thus no peace for either people because each is the victim of injustices perpetrated by the other. There can be no peace until all are secure. And there can be no security until there is justice for all.

Because of our two centuries of direct involvement in the Middle East, we Presbyterians are not afforded the luxury of being innocent bystanders to this deepening conflict. On the one hand, some of our "restorationist" Calvinist ancestors played an important part, beginning in the 1830s, in promoting the reestablishment of a homeland for the Hebrew people, while, on the other hand, our Reformed Protestant missionaries have long been in the region establishing churches, hospitals and, most importantly, schools that have served mainly Arabs. The "Arab Awakening" that eventually led to the establishment of independent Arab nations was born and nurtured in missionary schools. Here in the United States, our heritage is,

truthfully speaking, a mixture of blatant anti-Semitism and courageous intervention on behalf of Holocaust refugees, the pro-Arab influence of missionary offspring in the leadership of our denomination and in the State Department and the pro-Israel activism of clergy and laymen alike. We as human beings are not without sin, yet, as followers of Christ, we affirm the humanity of both Israelis and Palestinians, of Jews, Muslims and Christians alike.

The members of the Israel/Palestine Mission Network wholeheartedly ascribe to the repeated calls of the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (USA) for a recognition of Israel's right to exist, while also recognizing the rights of the Palestinian people to have a viable state of their own so that both peoples may live within two adjacent states with secure and mutually respected borders.

The Network condemns all acts of aggression, violence and terrorism, be they by Israelis against Palestinians or Palestinians against Israelis.

We therefore call on Israel to end its Occupation and carving up of the West Bank and we condemn its expansion through settlements and the building of the Separation Wall on Palestinian land. We also condemn the military and economic blockade of Gaza and the overall repression of the Palestinian people by their removal from and the demolition of their homes, the confiscation of their property and resources, their humiliation and

restriction of movement, economic strangulation and imprisonment without due process, the shelling and bombing of their civilian areas, the systematic assassinations of their leaders, and the killing of innocent Palestinian civilians, young and old.

We equally condemn anti-Semitism and the rhetoric of hatred against Israelis and Jews everywhere, the extremist elements of Islamist organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah, the Arab resistance to Israel's right to exist within secure borders, the random firing of rockets on settlements, the taking of prisoners and hostages, and the injury and killing of innocent civilians, young and old, by stones, bullets, bombs and suicide bombers.

Because we in the Israel/Palestine Mission Network believe the Occupation of the West Bank and blockade of Gaza are:

- causing untold inhuman hardship and suffering for the Palestinians
- destroying the soul of the Israeli nation based on "freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel" as well as on a pledge to "be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations"
- a major cause of the continuing anti-Semitism and violence being inflicted upon Jews world-wide

We therefore take it upon ourselves to promote education and advocacy within the Presbyterian Church (USA) that will further the cause of justice, security and peace in Israel/Palestine.

Peace-Making in Israel/Palestine

Biblical and Theological Reflections

Presbyterians have been involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for 60 years. We have aligned with Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers through these years with PCUSA overtures calling for peace and justice and engaging in one of the most complex and difficult social justice issues of our time.

As we prepare for the 218th General Assembly we offer the following biblical and theological reflections to enable us all, commissioners and advocates for peace, to work with a solid foundation.

**THE CONTEXT FOR PEACEMAKING**

ADVOCACY: EMPIRE! Jesus and the early church lived in the Empire of Rome. In our time we also live with Empires: forces of globalization, militarism, political and economic

exploitation. The United States is the leader

in this process but is joined by a wide coalition of the willing. We are reminded that Jesus called his Disciples to place their faith in a Kingdom and ethics that challenge the powers and principalities of this world. We must find ways to unmask powers and work effectively to bring justice to victims of the abuse of power and resources.

CHALLENGES AS PEACEMAKERS: A primary challenge is to be grounded spiritually to 'become the peace we wish to attain' (paraphrasing Gandhi). We have all seen hostile peacemakers, but we are called to be so centered in God's peace that we bring peace to the storms of our lives and events in which we engage, overcoming fear and hatred with transforming love, prophetic justice, and peace.

We are to be grounded spiritually by prayer, meditation, and times of solitude.

TOUGH-MINDED AND TENDER-HEARTED: Martin Luther King, Jr., encouraged this! If we are at least in a process of becoming the peace we wish to attain, we will have the "tough-mindedness" to be steadfast in our advocacy focus. We must be thoroughly informed and unrelenting in our search for truth. Dr. King reminds us that our tough-mindedness must be tempered by compassionate hearts lest we turn hostile. If we encounter criticism or abusive tactics, we must return it with truth-telling, tough love, and steadfastness.



NON-VIOLENCE: The life and teachings of Jesus call us to pursue non-violent resistance in our advocacy efforts. This is not just the engagement in certain actions labeled "non-violent," but an engagement with "Empire," understanding its assumptions for its order and developing resistance that exposes its injustice. Non-violent resistance calls for great imagination, discernment, a peaceful center, humor, and clarity of goals. When done right, it will be far more effective than violence.

HUMILITY: Philippians 2:1-11 calls us with humility as the central ingredient for peacemaking, as it is in our spiritual journey. Arrogance is our enemy. Humility comes from the Latin humus, referring to porous and fertile soil that is best for growing plants and flowers. To be peacemakers we must become open and porous, yet grounded like the earth. In the end, love and truth in God will triumph!

ATONEMENT: Philippians also gives us an image of Atonement – God's gift of love already available to us in faith. Under this gift life becomes a journey of grace, and we experience glimpses of what it means to be liberated from the grip of sin and evil. The Atonement is an act of re-humanization, restoring us to unity with God through Christ. We then are responsible to re-humanize a broken world, whether by evangelization, healing professions, advocating for social justice and a myriad of other ways.



OUR CALLING: Those of us who take on this complicated and difficult struggle for peace and justice in Israel and Palestine must never be complacent in the face of dehumanizing anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinian racism, Islamophobia and many violations of international law and human rights. We are called to a ministry of re-humanization of all persons involved, the Jew, the Muslim, the Palestinian Christian and ourselves, with humility, love, prophetic actions and truth telling.



Looking at the conflict through a human rights lens

Here is an excerpt from a presentation given by Prof. Jeff Halper to the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of PC(USA) in Chicago at its biannual meeting in May 2007.

First of all, I have to tell you, I have tremendous respect for the Presbyterian Church for the stand it's taken for Justice. And I want you to know that the Israeli Peace movement really appreciates that...

The world of human rights has emerged only in the last 60 years or so; it's a very new concept. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN in 1949. It is based on exactly the same concepts that faith based religions hold dear: the concept of human dignity. Over the last 60 years, the international community has nailed down in a very specific process what exactly "Human Rights" means.

When I speak to Jewish communities, I try to remind them of the tremendous commitment that Jews have always had to Human Rights and Civil Rights. That defines Judaism and it contradicts this whole stand that the organized Jewish community takes when it tries to defend Israel and the policy of occupation in the Palestinian Territories.

The author of the Declaration of Human Rights, René Cassin, was a French Jew who is basically thought of as "the Thomas Jefferson" of this whole world of Human Rights. I remind the American Jewish Communities, and

other Jewish Communities around the world, that Cassin won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1968 and is buried in the Pantheon in Paris with the likes of Victor Hugo and Rousseau. Most of them don't know this.

Cassin teamed up with Eleanor Roosevelt and together they pushed ratification of the Declaration through the UN General Assembly. It was a crucial time. The state members of the UN did not want to accept it because they felt it would impinge on their sovereignty. The Fourth Geneva Convention was formulated also in 1949 with the other Geneva Conventions against the backdrop of The Holocaust. And it was only because Jewish Groups, the same groups that are today defending the Israeli policies of Occupation, pushed for Human Rights in the late '40s. The American Jewish Committee, The American Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith, Haddassah and others were crucial [in the adoption of the Declaration] because in the wake of The Holocaust, the international community couldn't really refuse the Jews. So there was a window of opportunity after WWII and before The Cold War and McCarthyism closed things down. These were the years between 1945 and 1952 when

The Holocaust provided a backdrop for a lot of the legislation. With the help of these Jewish Organizations, Cassin and others were able to push through the four Geneva Conventions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

— JEFF HALPER

Nobel Peace Prize Nominee, 2006 &

Founder of ICAHD

(Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions)

A Jewish-American/Israeli citizen, living in

Israel for over 3 decades



**The Wall as seen from
inside Bethlehem**



What are Human Rights?

Here are some of the articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

- Human rights, both individual and collective, define and protect the inherent dignity of the human person.
- Every person possesses human rights simply by virtue of being a human being and these rights provide a floor below which human dignity cannot fall. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights
- Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person
- All are equal before the law
- Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights
- Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country
- Everyone has the right to a nationality; no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality
- No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property
- Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, and the right to security. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance

“Israel’s security will only be guaranteed by a just peace with the Palestinians based on human rights and international law.”

- Jeff Halper



The Right to Assert your Rights

A “right” is inalienable, absolute and universal, being integral to one’s fundamental dignity as a human being.

Everyone is entitled to each particular right.

No one can “lose” his or her human rights or give them up; no one has to ask for them to be “granted” or recognized; no one has the power to “grant” or withhold anyone else’s human rights.

Violations of fundamental human rights (collective and individual) :

The international community has a responsibility to both monitor violations of the Convention and to enforce them – an obligation it has failed to carry out.

A just and sustainable peace will come to Israel/Palestine only when Israel is held accountable for policies and actions in accordance with human rights, international humanitarian law and UN resolutions.

As seen through a human rights lens:

Israel’s security will only be guaranteed by a just peace with the Palestinians based on human rights and international law.

— Excerpt from a talk by Jeff Halper to the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of PC(USA)

Keynote Address

Friends of SABEEL Conference*
Old South Church, Boston, Ma
27th October 2007

Archbishop Desmond Tutu***A Prophetic Voice on*****PALESTINE & APARTHEID*****Dear Friends,***

I thank God for my Hebrew antecedents. I thank God that I too am a descendant of Abraham. I give thanks to God for the gift of the Holy Scriptures made up substantially of the Hebrew Scriptures forming what we conventionally refer to as our Old Testament. Even our New Testament which would be distinctively Christian, is incomprehensible without taking its Jewish setting seriously.

I am of Hebrew descent. That legacy has been of crucial importance to me in our struggle against Apartheid.

At the height of the struggle when apartheid's repression was at its most vicious and it seemed indeed as if the apartheid rulers were firmly ensconced in power, when they had all but knocked the stuffing out of their opponents and they were strutting the stage as invincible cocks of the walk, then we turned to the inspiration of our Hebrew tradition and antecedents.

We were able to revive and sustain our people's hope for their vindication and the ultimate triumph of good over evil, of freedom over injustice and oppression by our references to our biblical traditions. It was often quite exhilarating. On one occasion I used Exodus 3:1-9, "Our God is not deaf – our God has heard our cries; our God is not stupid – God knows our suffering; our God is not blind – God has seen and sees our pain and anguish and....yes, our God will come down and set us free." Yes, our God will come down to open the prison doors and lead our leaders from prison, lead them back from exile. For we had learned from our Jewish tradition that God, our God, is notoriously biased, forever taking the

side of the weak, the oppressed, the downtrodden against the kings and the powerful oppressors. Our God had been met first, not in the sanctuary, but in the mundane world of politics, taking the side of a rabble of slaves against the mighty Pharaoh. God is not neutral, God sided with Uriah the Hittite against his favourite, King David, after his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. Anywhere else the king could have got away with both actions, but not in Israel.

The widow, the orphan and the alien, who in most traditional societies would be the weakest of the weak, seemed to be particular favourites with God who appeared to have a soft spot for them. And so worship of God's people however elaborate and ritually correct would be dismissed as an abomination, unless it made the worshipper have the sensitivity to care for God's favourites. (Is.1:11-16) Even something so obviously religious as a fast was rejected out of hand by this God who could declaim that the kind of fast that he wanted was that which fed the hungry, set free the captives – all thoroughly secular activities but which confirmed Yahweh's bias in favour of and concern for those who were hard done by, who were at the end of their tether, who were so low they could crawl under a snake. We could multiply references to the prophets Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, et al. It reverberated throughout the prophetic writings, this concern for the poor, the hungry, the downtrodden, the widow, the orphan, the alien.

But it was not just in the prophetic oracles. It was so also in the Pentateuch, the Torah, the scriptures par excellence for God's chosen. Extraordinarily in what was perhaps the book most concerned for cultic ritual matters, Leviticus, where

holiness referred most frequently to ritual cultic purity, the worshipper, the Israelite, is bidden to be holy as Yahweh is holy, and just when we imagined that this would be concerned with ritual holiness, we are brought up short that this is a holiness that plays itself out in a concern for the hungry, the poor. "Be holy even as your God is holy," and so you must not glean your fields clean at harvest, leave something for the poor and hungry too. (Lev.19:1,98) Fantastic – God's special people must be holy, but this is a holiness that expresses itself in mundane acts of caring, of kindness and compassion, of humanitarian concern. In Deuteronomy the motive for doing acts of kindness to God's favourites, the widow, the orphan and the alien is not emulating God's holiness, it is the memory of their former status as slaves in Egypt. That memory, it is implied, would prevent them from inflicting on others the kind of anguish they had experienced. They would never do to others, it is assumed, what had been done to them.

I think they are words to be written in letters of gold as pertinent to the situation we are in.

Deuteronomy 24:17-22

"You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge; but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow; that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.

When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this."

That is how the people of this God were expected to behave. If you were set to rule over these people as king these were as it were your marching orders, your manifesto, found in the book of Psalms (Psalm 72:1-4,12-14)

"Give the king thy justice, O God, and thy righteousness to the royal son!

May he judge thy people with righteousness, and the poor with justice!

Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness!

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor!

For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper.

He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight."

The three sections of the Hebrew scriptures – the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings are unanimous in their depiction of the nature of the God revealed in these books.

And God vindicated us. Apartheid's rulers bit the dust as all oppressors have done always, for this is a moral universe; right and wrong matter. It cannot happen that evil, injustice and oppression can have the last word. No, ultimately goodness, justice, freedom – these will prevail.

My address is a *cri de Coeur*, a cry of anguish from the heart, an impassioned plea to my spiritual relatives, the offspring of Abraham like me – please hear the call, the noble call of your scriptures, of our scriptures, to be with the God of the Exodus who took the side of a bunch of slaves against the powerful Pharaoh, be on the side of the God who intervened through His prophet Elijah on behalf of Naboth, hear the plea of your scriptures and stand with the God who intervened through his prophet Nathan on behalf of Uriah against King David. Be on the side of the God who revealed a soft spot in his heart for the widow, the orphan and the alien; be on the side of the God whose "Spirit sends us out to preach good news to the poor." Don't be found fighting against the God, your God, our God who hears the cry of the oppressed, who sees their anguish and who will always come down to deliver them. Be not opposed to the God whose Spirit when it anoints you makes you concerned for the poor. This is your calling. If you disobey that calling, if you

do not heed it, then as sure as anything one day you will come a cropper. You will probably not succumb to an outside assault militarily. With the unquestioning support of the USA, you are probably impregnable. But you who are called are they who are asked to deal with the oppressed, the weak, the despised compassionately, caringly, remembering what happened to you in Egypt and much more recently in Germany. Remember and act appropriately. If you reject your calling you may survive for a long time, but you will find it is all corrosive inside, and one day you will implode. When you uphold an unjust dispensation, it corrodes your humanity.

Thanks be to God for the many, many Jews who know what their divine calling is and who want the Israeli Government to live it out.

The world needs the Jews, Jews who are faithful to their vocation that has meant so much for the world's morality, of its sense of what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, what is just and unjust, what is oppressive and what sets people free. Jews are indispensable for a good compassionate, just and caring world.

And so are Palestinians.

--Desmond Tutu

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Below: The wall surrounding Bethlehem and the checkpoint exit/entrance in the distance.





Our General Assembly Mandate

MISSION NETWORKS RELATED TO THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH U.S.A:

- Are grassroots groups of Presbyterians from congregations, presbyteries and synods with partner interests in particular regions of the world.
- Lift up the needs of global church partners and Christian churches worldwide.
- Are facilitated by the World Mission division of the PC(USA) and are informed by the General Assembly of the PC(USA)
- Do not speak on behalf of the PC(USA).
- Take no actions on behalf of, or represent their actions, decision, or communications to other groups, entities, or international church partners as being PC(USA) World Mission division actions, policies or communications.
- Are, nonetheless, important voices in the formation of strategic goals and programs of implementation.

General Assembly, 2004

“...for the purpose of creating currents of wider and deeper Presbyterian involvement with Palestinian partners, aimed at demonstrating solidarity and changing the conditions that erode the humanity of Palestinians living in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.”

Our Membership

Our members are PC(USA) leaders from different walks of life and different parts of the country who share a passion to bring a just peace to Israel/Palestine. Some of the presbyteries represented include:

| | | |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Carlisle | Hudson River | Ohio Valley |
| Central Florida | Long Island | Philadelphia |
| Charlotte | Los Ranchos | San Fernando |
| Chicago | Mackinac | San Francisco |
| Cimarron | Mid-Kentucky | San Gabriel |
| Cincinnati | Minnesota Valleys | San Jose |
| de Christo | Mission | Scioto Valley |
| Des Moines | Muskingum Valley | Seattle |
| Detroit | National Capital | Southeast Illinois |
| Donegal | New Brunswick | St. Augustine |
| East Iowa | New Castle | Susquehanna Valley |
| Eastern Virginia | New Hope | Twin Cities Area |
| Elizabeth | New York City | Tampa Bay |
| Genesee Valley | Newark | Utica |
| Grace | North Puget Sound | Wabash Valley |
| Great Rivers | Northern New York | West Virginia |
| Greater Atlanta | Northern Waters | Western New York |

Steering Committee

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 Donald Mead, Vice Moderator
 Pauline Coffman, Secretary
 Len Bjorkman
 Jeffrey DeYoe
 Noushin Framke
 Donald Maclay
 Shannon Parks-Beck
 David Yeaworth

Advisors:
 Victor Makari
 Mark McCabe
 Elizabeth Sanders
Regional Liaison:
 Douglas Dicks

Join Us!

