



peacemaking through partnerships, education and advocacy

ISRAEL/PALESTINE MISSION NETWORK of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, U.S.A.

January 6, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President-elect of the United States
Presidential Transition Team
Washington, DC 20270

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Dear Mr. President-elect,

We write as Presbyterians committed to peace and justice in Palestine and Israel, first to congratulate you on your historic victory, and second to outline concerns for those peoples related to the historic mission of our church. The authors of this letter, the Israel/Palestine Mission Network, have also invited signatories from across the Presbyterian Church (USA) because of our Christian hopes at this season and also because of the desperate realities for many in the occupied territories.

In saluting your election as forty-fourth President of the United States of America, we acknowledge that we share the conviction of millions of your supporters that U.S. foreign policy needs again to become a force for justice, human rights, and respect for international law. You have eloquently invoked the ideals for which our country truly stands, ideals which are our strongest defense against tyranny and terrorism. We look forward to supporting your leadership in policies that will restore the legitimacy of our nation as an honest broker of both peace and justice in the world community. And we know you are aware of how central the Israel/Palestine conflict is to relations with 1.2 billion Muslims and countless others concerned with justice for the dispossessed.

In this season in which our church, along with all Christians throughout the world, celebrates the birth of the one we call Lord, we turn our attention again to Bethlehem and the whole land in which he was born. Our network represents thousands of Presbyterian Christians and ecumenical partners who have spent countless hours in Israel as well as in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Many of our people have been in those territories, behind walls, electric fences, and other kinds of barriers not only to be in fellowship with an oppressed people, but to support them in their attempts to have the semblance of normal life in an occupied land.

We have assisted Palestinians in harvesting olive crops and grieved with them when they were unable to reach their trees because of illegal walls and checkpoints. We have accompanied Palestinian children to schools so that they would not be harassed, and even injured, by extremist Jewish settlers or members of the Israeli Defense Force. We have stood in solidarity with Palestinians forcibly removed from their ancestral homes while Israeli bulldozers completely razed those structures, leaving entire families homeless. We have also stood side by side with concerned Israelis who are deeply troubled by what their government continues to do to fellow human beings, trying to survive in what essentially is the most massive imprisonment of humanity in the world today. We have been inside that prison and have worshiped with its inhabitants in their communities of faith. We have come to know in the most direct and human of ways that this is a people being punished simply for who they are.

In 2004 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) established our mission network to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people, and particularly with Palestinian Christians who have been steadily declining in numbers. (If current Israeli policies continue, it is likely that indigenous

Christianity in the Holy Land will disappear) When our network began organizing for this work we chose the name, "Israel/Palestine Mission Network," to reflect our firm belief that in order for Israel to know lasting peace and security, Palestine must have justice and all three faiths must have freedom and mutual respect.

Therefore, we firmly support the right of Israel to exist within secure and internationally-recognized borders living at peace with a Palestinian state that is viable in every sense of that word. We pray that Palestinians will *no longer* live in a nation occupied by the army of a neighboring nation; *no longer* have to contend with walls, fences, segregated road systems and checkpoints belonging to that occupier, which cut its citizens off from economic viability and each other; *no longer* live under the dark cloud of wondering when the military bulldozers of that occupier will come and destroy their homes in a tactic that looks so much like ethnic and religious cleansing; *no longer* have to sit by and watch foreign settlers build beautiful cities and road systems on their land, which they cannot access, and usurp their natural resources, including their most precious commodity: water; *no longer* have to helplessly watch their olive crop rot on trees on the other side of a wall because the military closes the only checkpoints giving them passage to their groves; *no longer* have to choose between resistance—sometimes violent and tragic—and the daily humiliation and powerlessness of the vast majority.

Similarly, we pray that young Israeli soldiers will *no longer* need to serve in an army of occupation, thus damaging their own humanity; that *no longer* will Israelis need to fear rockets or bombs; and that Israel will *no longer* need to defend itself against almost unanimous international censure for its long occupation. We salute the brave Israeli conscientious objectors who refuse to be occupiers, and the honest citizens who recognize the moral as well as financial costs of the occupation.

For these reasons, we appeal to you as a person of faith and deep understanding concerning the plight of oppressed and struggling peoples throughout this world. As you stood in Berlin before your election, overlooking that massive crowd, you saw in a clear way the world's hope and belief that you will lead, not only this nation, but this struggling global community in striving for justice in places where only oppression and desperation presently exist.

This is the time, we believe, when substantive and meaningful change can come to the life of both Israelis and Palestinians in a way that is not a continuation of the failed efforts and policies of the past. We believe, as so well said by Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski that as President-elect you must speak out *clearly and forcefully about the fundamental principles of the peace process and press the case with steady determination*. We urge you to make this a top priority at the start of your administration, making it clear to your appointees that your will as President is for a just peace to come to both Israel and an independent, autonomous and economically viable Palestinian state. Indeed, not only is the future security and stability of Israel dependent upon that, so is the strength of the U.S. security and relationships throughout the Middle East.

We close with the prayer and prophecy of Isaiah 11, that *now* is the time when both Israelis and Palestinians can again hope that theirs will be the land where *the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them... (and where none) will hurt or destroy on all of God's holy mountain*.

With your careful and committed leadership, may it be so. Please know our heartfelt prayers are with you in this important work and for the entirety of your Presidency. We invite you, along with your new administration, to join with us and all others who pray in sincerity for peace, security and justice in a genuinely "Holy Land."

Sincerely,
Carol Hylkema, Moderator
On Behalf of the Israel/Palestine Mission Network
The Presbyterian Church (USA)

Attch: Signatures