

PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

OPTIONS

In addition to Divestment (See Plumline # 1), delegates will be asked to consider petitions in two other categories related to peace in the Middle East. One category includes petitions that advocate for justice, peace and security for both Israel and Palestine; the other includes petitions that support only Israel, a stance that is harmful to the region in the long term. The second category involves petitions that appear to express concerns for Muslims, such as supporting women's rights or improving Christian-Muslim relations, but go on to discredit Muslims and the Islamic faith.

ISSUE

At issue is how the United Methodist Church can support justice, peace and security in both Israel and Palestine and how to continue furthering relationships and dialogue with both Muslim and Jewish peoples.

ANALYSIS

A lasting peace for peoples of the Holy Land has long been the goal of United Methodists. According to Sec. 312 of the *2004 Book of Resolutions*, "We seek for all people in the region an end to military occupation and full respect for the human rights of all under international law."

After forty years of occupation, the peoples of both Israel and Palestine are weary of war, their respective economies are negatively affected, and most people in Israel and Palestine want a two-state solution with viable and sustainable borders and security. Yet, the continuing confiscation of Palestinian land for construction of Israeli settlements, the building of a separation barrier that stands three stories high in highly populated areas such as Bethlehem, the check points that limit Palestinian mobility and a blockade in Gaza subvert the peace process and foster a sense of desperation. Violence continues disproportionately from the Israeli military and its sophisticated weaponry although individual Palestinians and some militant groups have attacked Israelis.

According to B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, during the past 7 _ years, a total of 4,604 Palestinians (including 888 minors) were killed by Israeli security forces and 1,033 Israeli security force personnel and civilians (including 119 minors) were killed by Palestinians. The blockade in Gaza has effectively dismantled the economy, impoverished the population, and limited access to medical care. As the head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency stated, "Hungry, unhealthy, angry communities do not make good partners for peace."

Following the horrific events of 9/11, discrimination against and hostility toward Muslims has significantly increased in the U. S. Polls taken since 2002, indicate that Americans know little about Islam or the views and beliefs of people in Muslim countries, yet, an Islamo-phobia has

developed that attributes negative behaviors including terrorism to Muslims. A major survey released in early 2008 of 50,000 Muslims in 35 countries show that while they are highly religious, 93% are politically moderate and most of them desire democracy. According to this survey, of the 7% who are politically radical, an even larger percent admire the West for its democracy and freedom, although they do not want such things imposed on them.

Condemning selected practices of Islam is in contrast to the UMC affirmation of its commitment to relationship and dialogue with both Muslim and Jewish peoples. “Christians and Muslims acknowledge common roots, along with Jews, in the faith of Abraham and Sarah.... As members of one of the monotheistic world religions, Muslims worship and serve the one God with disciplined devotion. Both Christians and Muslims believe that God is ever-inclined toward humankind in justice and mercy.” (2004 *Book of Resolutions*, p. 798.)

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Vote for: Petition # 80155-C1-R999-Middle East Conflict, p. 268, “Saying No to Violence in Middle East Conflict” a new resolution from the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns that affirms the United Methodist Church commitment to relationship and dialogue with Jews and Muslims, affirms support of the 1967 boundaries and opposes Israeli settlements in occupied territories, and advocates for a peaceful settlement through diplomacy.

Vote for: Petition # 80430-GM-R199-Resolution 199 (revised), p. 1105, “United Methodist Church Use of Fair Trade Coffee” adds “and Other Fair Trade Products” including tea, cocoa, olive oil and other products available from small farmer cooperatives around the world, including Palestinian farmers.

Vote for: Petition # 80437-GM-R292-Resolution 292 (revised), p. 1112 “Holy Land Tours” urges United Methodists planning, organizing and/or participating in trips to the Middle East to include visiting Palestine as an opportunity for ecumenical fellowship, to spend at least one overnight in Bethlehem and to purchase Palestinian-made fair trade products to help balance the tourism money being spent in Israeli hotels, tour companies and businesses.

Vote for: Petition # 80520-GM-R323-Resolution 323 (readopt and amend), p. 1112 “Peace in Palestine and Israel.” Calls upon the United States government and governments of United Methodists globally to abide by United Nation Resolutions that provide a framework for bringing Israeli/Palestinian conflict to a just and permanent end.

Vote against: the following petitions that support only one side in the struggle for peace.

- Petition #80042 -CI-R999** New Resolution, p. 267, “Support for Israel”
- Petition#80504-CI-R999** New Resolution, p. 267, “Israel and Apartheid”
- Petition#81378-C2-R999** New Resolution, p. 431, “Anti-Semitism”
- Petition#1091-GM-NonDis**, p. 1091, “Withdraw form Campaign”
- Petition#81027-GM-R312**, p. 1120, “Support for Israel”,

Vote against: the following petitions submitted by IRD and Good News that promote Christianity over Islam in well-crafted language and titles that seem on first glance to be constructive but in essence condemn Islam and would harm UMC-Muslim relations.

- Petition #80505-C1-R9999**, p. 279, “Statement on Hamas”
- Petition #8248-C2-R999**, p. 425, “Affirming Solidarity”
- Petition #81342-C2-RR999**, p. 429, “Women’s Rights in the Islamic World”
- Petition #81253-GM-R999**, p. 1150, “Theocratic and Radical Islam”
- Petition #81393-IC-R999**, p. 1294, “Promoting Christian-Muslim Relations”