



January 31, 2008

A CALL TO END THE SIEGE OF GAZA

The recent events in the Gaza Strip are yet another proof that the only solution to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is for Israel to end its illegal, violence-breeding occupation of Palestine. Israel's punitive and military actions will not end rocket firing or other violent reactions by Palestinians. Only justice can lead to peace.

Israel's continued occupation of Palestine and constant domination of Palestinian civilians for three generations is nothing short of criminal. The oppression of the 1.5 million residents of Gaza is particularly inhuman and immoral. Israel in effect has imprisoned the entire Gaza population since January 2006 within a concrete wall; and then proceeded with air raids, military incursions, and extrajudicial targeted assassinations. Israel further imposed complete isolation on the Gaza strip since June 2007, and increased its tactics of blockade and intimidation – interrupting electricity and blocking supplies of medicine and fuel. This is deliberate cruel collective punishment, and indiscriminate terrorization of an entire population – young and old, women, men and children. It is blatant savagery.

While we do not agree with militant methodology employed by some Palestinians, and reject it categorically as violent means, we must condemn the Israeli occupation as the root cause of the continued conflict. Israel's willful prolonging of its occupation of Palestinian Territories can only be explained, not for reasons of security, but in order that it continues to confiscate more Palestinian land for the building of illegal settlements exclusively for its Jewish citizens. In so doing, Israel is overtly creating "facts on the ground" to prejudice the outcome of any future negotiations with Palestinians. With such reckless behavior, Israel is hurling the whole region into chaos.

We, the National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus, join the patriarchs and heads of Christian Churches in Jerusalem in condemning the most recent blockade of Gaza by Israeli authorities. We call on the government of Israel to fulfill its duty under international law, and its obligations according to universal standards of human rights, by immediately lifting its siege of the residents of Gaza. We call on the citizens of Israel to cause their government to end its criminal occupation of all Palestinian Territories.

We call on our own denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as it has committed itself to following the call of Christ in the task of peacemaking, to take active measures to address American implication in and support of Israel's occupation of Palestine.

It is our hope and prayer that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will continue to be a faithful witness to the Gospel of God's love and a voice for just peace and reconciliation in the Middle East.

The Executive Committee of the
National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus