

Justice Peace Links

Justice and Peace Committee – Churchwide Coordinating Team – Presbyterian Women

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Women in War with a Focus on the Middle East

by Aida Faris

Background

The Middle East is strategically situated between the East and the West. It is rich in oil, and is the cradle of the world's three largest religions. For these and other reasons, it has attracted invaders throughout its history. The persecution exercised by these invaders left some Middle East peoples angry, hopeless and ready to react.

History shows that men carry the *arms* in wars but women and children are the *victims* of wars. Only a small percentage of women enroll in armies or commit violent acts. A large number of women in the Middle East are justice and peace advocates.

Women as Bridge Builders

In Lebanon: Many women created their own associations during the 16-year war (1975–1991) to feed people who were hungry, clothe those who were naked and find shelters for people who were homeless. To contribute to the reconstruction of the country, it was important to many women to keep educational institutions open and offer scholarships to war victims.

In Afghanistan: Untold numbers of women risked their lives, working alone or in secret groups, to provide education to young girls in the absence of schools. They struggled against tyranny and worked to get their plea to the rest of the world for help. As the fighting continues in their country, their struggle for justice and peace continues.

In Iraq: During the current war, numerous Iraqi women are active in the political arena promoting



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peace. On the national level, women are struggling to have their voices heard—only three women were nominated to the interim Iraqi Governing Council.

In Palestine/Israel: Palestinian and Israeli women work together to advocate peace. Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam is a cooperative village of Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Here Jews and Arabs share the same schools for their children and the same philosophy about peaceful living and alternatives to violence. In July of 2004, four women from Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam spent one week at the Chautauqua Institution in upstate New York, discussing their lives as friends and peacemakers. In Jerusalem, Arab women of the Jerusalem Center for Women, and Israeli women of Bat Shalom, work together for peace under the name Jerusalem Link.

Biblical/Theological Dimensions

What does Holy Scripture say about peace?

“This God—[God’s] way is perfect;
the promise of the Lord proves true;
[God] is a shield for all who take refuge in [God]”
(2 Sam. 22:31).

“You have heard that it was said ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love

your enemies and pray for those persecute you” (*Matt. 5:43–44*).

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful” (*Col. 3:15*).

PC(USA)’s Response

The 216th General Assembly (Richmond, Virginia, 2004) voted to explore divesting from companies whose actions support

the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and directly or indirectly harm Israelis or Palestinians.

What Can PW Do?

- Pray for the safety of Middle Eastern sisters in Christ, and pray that they achieve their goals.
- Participate in a vigil with Women in Black, an international peace action group. Learn more at www.womeninblack.net.

- Establish solidarity circles that communicate regularly with women working for peace in the Middle East and other areas of war. Visit www.peacexpeace.org for examples of circles working toward peaceful communications.
- Host an international peacemaker at your church or community gathering. Learn more at www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/intl/international.htm or by calling 888/728-7228, ext. 5784.

W Web Sites

www.al-bab.com

An Open Door to the Arab World offers links to newspapers, events and articles about Arab countries.

www.batshalom.org

Bat Shalom is an organization of Jewish and Palestinian Israeli women working together for peace.

www.coalitionofwomen.org

Coalition of Women for Peace brings together individual women and nine women’s peace organizations. It is one of the leading voices in Israel advocating for a just and viable peace.

www.oasisofpeace.org

American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam describes the community of 50 families, 25 Jewish and 25 Palestinian, all with Israeli citizenship, who are dedicated to dialogue, cooperation and genuine durable peace.

www.pcusa.org/peacemaking

Presbyterian Peacemaking Program offers resources, training and events, and coordinates visits from International Peacemakers to PC(USA) congregations or events.

www.peacenow.org

Americans for Peace Now works to build an informed pro-peace American public.

www.womenwagingpeace.net

Women Waging Peace is a network of women peacemakers advocating for the full participation of women in formal and informal peace processes around the world.

r Resources

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