

WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

May 12, 2008

This week's messages are—

- End Crisis in Southern Israel & Gaza: Enable Progress on Peace
- Building Walls, Destroying Habitat
- Call your Senators on May 12: Urge Them to Ban Cluster Bombs
- Jeremiah 4:1-2 – If you return, O Israel

End Crisis in Southern Israel & Gaza: Enable Progress on Peace Urge your Member to Sign the Price-Lahood Letter to President Bush

Ahead of President Bush's May 13-18 Middle East trip and with the ongoing crisis in southern Israel and Gaza, Representatives David Price (D-NC) and Ray Lahood (R-IL) began circulating a sign-on letter supporting Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts and urging the President to find solutions to "stabilize the Gaza situation, preserve the achievements made in peace talks, and maintain forward momentum."

In the letter, Reps. Price and Lahood express their "fear that the status quo, with its constant threat of a new eruption of terror and violence, can too easily derail progress toward achieving an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement in 2008." The letter condemns rocket attacks on residential communities in southern Israel and supports Israel's right to self-defense. The letter also recognizes that many Palestinian civilians have been killed and wounded in Israel's operations aimed at militant groups and that the blockade of Gaza is exacerbating an already grave humanitarian situation. The two Representatives suggest that a solution for the crisis must include an exploration of a potential Israel-Hamas ceasefire to stop the violence and an end to the border closures that addresses Israel's security needs and provides relief to the people of Gaza. The "Dear Colleague letter from Reps. Price and Lahood, inviting their congressional colleagues to join their letter, is below. The deadline for sign-on is today, Monday, May 12th.

The Heads of nineteen major Christian denominations, in their own letter on February 29th, urged Secretary Rice to take urgent diplomatic action to "resolve the Gaza crisis and enable substantive progress forward on peace negotiations." Despite some efforts at mediation, nearly two months later the crisis sadly remains unresolved, Palestinians and Israelis continue to suffer, and the credibility of the peace process is weakened. Until now, Congress has not offered constructive, forward-looking solutions. Your Representative needs to hear from you now that you support efforts to reinvigorate Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking.

TAKE ACTION

Call your representative TODAY! The US Capitol switchboard: (202) 224-3121 will connect you to any office.

Your Message: Sign the Price-Lahood Letter to President Bush Supporting Efforts to End Crisis in Southern Israel and Gaza and Enable Real Progress on Israeli-Palestinian Peace.

Talking Points:

I agree with Price and Lahood that the ongoing crisis in southern Israel and Gaza is undermining progress on the Annapolis Peace process.

The Price-Lahood letter offers sensible solutions to stabilize the Gaza situation and keep the peace negotiations on track, including a cease-fire to stop the violence and an end to the border blockade that meets Israel's security needs and provides humanitarian relief for Gaza.

As an American Christian, I am deeply concerned about the continued Palestinian rocket attacks on the residents of southern Israel and the impact of Israeli military responses and border closures on the people of Gaza. I urge you to sign the Price-Lahood letter and help provide hope to the people of the Holy Land that peace is possible.

The Dear Colleague Letter

Creating an Atmosphere Conducive to Peace –
As Bush Heads to the Region, Urge Efforts to End the Crisis in Southern Israel
and Gaza

Dear Colleague,

The Annapolis peace process launched by President Bush last November provided a new opportunity for forward momentum to achieve a negotiated two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sadly, the hopes that were raised are quickly fading, in large part due to the ongoing and escalating crisis in southern Israel and Gaza.

Next week, President Bush will travel to the Middle East and, following celebrations of Israel's 60th anniversary, will hold talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders in Sharm al Sheikh. While this visit is an important opportunity to advance the peace process, serious progress will only be possible if a solution is found to stabilize the Gaza situation and preserve the achievements made in negotiations.

So far this year, nearly 1,000 rockets have been fired by Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups from the Gaza Strip into Israel – intentionally aimed at residential

communities in southern Israel such as Sderot, and reaching as far as the city of Ashkelon. We strongly condemn these attacks, which have terrorized, killed, and injured many Israelis, and we support Israel's right to self-defense. We also recognize that many Palestinian civilians have been killed and wounded in Israeli operations targeted at militants. In addition, sanctions imposed by Israel on Gaza to pressure Hamas have exacerbated an already grave humanitarian situation. In this climate, the credibility of the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks has been weakened.

The current status quo, with its constant threat of a new eruption of terror and violence, seriously harms the security of both the Israeli and Palestinian people and undermines the chances for achieving progress toward Israeli-Palestinian peace. As President Bush prepares to travel to Israel in the hopes of re-energizing peace talks, please join us in urging him to redouble his own efforts and commitment, and to seek solutions and strategies that will stabilize Gaza, strengthen the credibility of the ongoing negotiations, and maintain forward momentum toward a lasting peace.

To sign on to this letter, please contact Tommy Ross with Rep. Price (tommy.ross@mail.house.gov) or Sarah Cottingham with Rep. LaHood (sarah.cottingham@mail.house.gov) by close of business on Monday, May 12, 2008.

Sincerely,

DAVID PRICE
Member of Congress

RAY LAHOOD
Member of Congress

General Assembly Guidance:

The 2003 General Assembly reaffirms the actions of previous General Assemblies (cf., in 1998, 1997, 1996, 1995, 1992, 1991, 1990 several resolutions, 1988, 1987, 1986, and earlier to 1967) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and communications by the Stated Clerk based on those actions (cf., most recently: April 5, 2002; March 8 and 11, 2002; October 14, 2000, etc.):

- Strongly urges Israeli and Palestinian leaders to be serious, active, and diligent about seeking peace for their peoples; or, if they are unwilling or unable, to step down and make room for other leaders who will and can.
- Urges the Israeli government and the Palestinian leadership to work on resolving the issue of the right of return. With the assistance of the United Nations, both sides can, if they will, strive for and reach, an understanding that affirms the right of return of Palestinians while working out a mutually acceptable formula for implementation.
- Urges the government of Israel to hasten to end the occupation of Palestinian territories; and to accept the League of the Arab Nations' unanimous offer for peace in return of the land occupied by Israel since 1967 and urges the League of

- the Arab Nations to commit to doing everything in their power to eliminate funding and support for terrorist acts against Israeli citizens.
- Strongly urges the United States to take seriously its leadership role to begin a peace initiative that will end Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem and fulfill the stated goal of a two-state settlement based on the pre-1967 boundaries as directed by UNSC 242. The administration needs to be fair in listening to the legitimate needs of both the Israelis and the Palestinians and to require both to adhere to the same standards of nonaggression. An end of the occupation is essential to achieving peace and the common good of the two peoples and three faiths that are deeply rooted in this land.
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Building Walls, Destroying Habitat

But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being. – Job 12:7-10

Most people in the U.S. have heard about the construction of hundreds of miles of fences and walls along the U.S.-Mexico border. Few, however, understand what devastating consequences such a barrier will have for all the inhabitants of the desert, not just those seeking to cross it in order to find work in the U.S. The jaguar, the ocelot, the gray wolf – unusual faces on the banners of the immigration debate.

Almost one third of the land on the U.S. side of the border is in public hands. It includes wildlife refuges, national forests, national monuments, and other beautiful swaths of pristine lands. The border fence will cut through places like Organ Pipe National Monument in Arizona, home to over 500 species of plants, 50 species of mammals, and nearly 300 species of birds. In Arizona alone, 39 species are listed as protected, or proposed to be protected, under the Endangered Species Act. As the fence is built, acre after acre of pristine habitat is destroyed to make way for construction of multilayered fencing and access roads. Animals that regularly migrated back and forth across the border are now cut off from breeding grounds and food sources.

For decades, the governments of the U.S. and Mexico worked together to negotiate the protection of the fragile border ecosystem, through agreements such as the La Paz Agreement on Cooperation for the Protection and Improvement of the Environment and Border 2012. But this work is being undone in a matter of months. On April 1, 2008, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced that it was imposing a blanket waiver of environmental and land management laws along the U.S.-Mexico border, giving DHS agents permission to ignore 35 laws in order to complete construction of 470 miles of border fence by the end of 2008. Among the 35 laws waived were the Clean Air Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Eagle Protection Act, the Native American Graves

Protection and Repatriation Act, and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. These are laws that protect not only wildlife but also human health and Native American land and religious freedom as well.

What allows DHS to waive these laws is a little known provision in the Real ID Act, which was meant to expedite the construction of one section of fence in the San Diego region. This provision is now being used by DHS to build the fence in other locations, without proper environmental impact studies and without input from local communities. It is a dangerous, disturbing precedent to allow one government agency to completely ignore laws passed by the U.S. Congress, and will cause irreparable damage to fragile ecosystems where shrinking populations of species struggle already to survive.

Representative Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) has proposed H.R. 2593, the Borderlands Conservation and Security Act of 2007 in the U.S. House of Representatives. This legislation would:

- Require compliance with laws meant to protect the air, water, wildlife, culture, and the health and safety of people in borderland communities.
- Give land management agencies, Native American tribes, and local communities a voice in border construction and decision-making.
- Provide experts at DHS the ability to decide whether fences, vehicle barriers, or virtual fences would be most effective in securing the border.
- Provide resources to help mitigate damage to borderland wildlife and resources.

Click <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/issues/alert/?alertid=11358941> to urge your representative to cosponsor H.R. 2593. Congress is hearing from those who speak out of fear and xenophobia. Let them hear from those who speak out of a genuine love for all God's creation.

General Assembly Policy:

The 217th General Assembly (2006), in its statement "On Advocacy and Welcome for All Immigrants," expressed "grave concern about the negative impact of the growing effort to make the border more secure through building walls designed to move migrant patterns further into the more dangerous part of the borderlands..."

In 1990, the 202nd adopted "Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice, in which it "recognize[ed] and accept[ed] restoring creation as a central concern of the church, to be incorporated into its life and mission at every level." The statement continues, "the 202nd General Assembly recommends... policies that preserve wildlands in all the diverse kinds of American ecosystems... and restore degraded wildlands, reintroducing all the original native fauna and flora where possible."

** This article is adapted from "Building Walls, Destroying God's Creation," by Tammy Alexander of the Mennonite Central Committee Washington office, published Feb. 27, 2008.*

For Mother's Day, stand with mothers around the world who have lost a child to a cluster bomb.

Call your Senators on May 12: Urge Them to Ban Cluster Bombs

More than 100 governments will gather to negotiate a global treaty banning cluster bombs on May 19 in Dublin, Ireland. The United States has decided not to participate. Please help Congress send the right message to the world by generating additional cosponsors for the Cluster Munitions Civilian Protection Act (S.594/H.R.1755).

Unexploded cluster bombs kill in horrible ways: children play with bomblets thinking they're toys, and farmers stumble across them tending their fields. During the last 40 years, the best research indicates that 98 percent of cluster bomb casualties have been civilians, including 12,000 civilian casualties in Laos and another 4,000 in Iraq. Cluster bombs just don't know when the war has ended.

On May 12: Make Your Call

Call your senators at 800-401-3641.

(See below the Senators who have already sponsored the bill and don't need a call).

This number connects you to the Capitol Switchboard. You will need to ask for your senator by name. Find out who your senators are at <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials/>. Just type in your zip code.

Once you are directed to the office, ask to speak to the legislative assistant who deals with foreign policy issues.

After you call one senator's office, call back and ask for your other senator.

Script to Help You Make Your Call

Please feel free to improvise and add additional information.

My name is [NAME], and I live in [CITY, STATE]. Thanks for taking my call. I'm calling to encourage Senator [SENATOR'S NAME] to cosponsor S. 594, the Cluster Munitions Civilian Protection Act. Will that be possible?

Thank you.

Who Already Supports the Bill?

You don't need to call the senators listed below.

California: Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer
Iowa: Senator Tom Harkin

Maine: Senator Olympia Snowe
Maryland: Senators Ben Cardin and Barbara Mikulski
Massachusetts: Senators Ted Kennedy and John Kerry
Michigan: Senator Debbie Stabenow
New Mexico: Senator Jeff Bingaman
Ohio: Senator Sherrod Brown
Oregon: Senator Ron Wyden
Pennsylvania: Senator Robert Casey
Rhode Island: Senator Sheldon Whitehouse
South Dakota: Senator Tim Johnson
Vermont: Senators Patrick Leahy and Bernie Sanders
Washington: Senator Maria Cantwell
Wisconsin: Senator Russ Feingold

General Assembly Guidance:

The General Assembly's guidelines for military-related investment, adopted in 1982 and most recently revised in 1998, include particular concern over weapons that do not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. The policy urges divestment from corporations that produce weapons whose use can lead to mass or indiscriminate injury and/or death to civilians, including nuclear warheads, chemical and biological weapons, anti-personnel weapons such as landmines, and assault-type automatic and semi-automatic weapons.

Cluster munitions are the latest military weapon to draw public attention for their indiscriminate nature, both at the time of the initial attack, as well as for the tendency for a portion of the bomb to remain unexploded, in the ground as a hidden 'landmine.'

Jeremiah 4:1-2 – If you return, O Israel

If you return, O Israel,
says the Lord,
if you return to me,
if you remove your abominations from my presence,
and do not waver,
and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives!'
in truth, in justice, and in uprightness,
then nations shall be blessed by him,
and by him they shall boast.

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Thank You.

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