



August 7, 2006

A CALL FOR GENUINE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

We, the National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus, are Reformed Christians and members of The Presbyterian Church (USA). We are Middle Eastern Americans who trace our faith origin to the apostolic age and our Reformed roots to the Presbyterian missions in the 19th. century. We strive to be a responsible, Christian voice for justice, peace, and reconciliation in the USA and the Middle East.

We are exceedingly grieved by, and frustrated at, the latest wave of violence in our homelands. It has been very painful for us to watch Lebanon and Gaza being torn apart by the ferocity of Israel's attacks. We are shocked and angered by the loss of innocent civilian lives, the vast majority of whom are women, children, and senior citizens. We are horrified by the massive and disproportionate destruction of buildings and infrastructures in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories. We are equally saddened at the loss of innocent Israeli lives caused by unjustifiable rocketing by the militant groups Hezbollah and Hamas.

We reject and condemn the ideologies, methodologies, and tactics of all militant groups, both secular and religious, on all sides. We abhor all forms of violence, especially attacks against civilians in the form of suicide bombings, terrorist tactics, and state sponsored air raids and violations of human rights.

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES AND THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

Given the development of events in the past few decades, we recognize the state of Israel as the expressed right of the Israeli people for self-determination. With equal conviction, we recognize the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

For decades now Israel has been in violation of numerous UN Security Council resolutions that call for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from all territories occupied in the 1967 war (e.g. 242 and 338). We believe that if Israel had complied with these resolutions, the region would not have been in constant violence and turmoil, and the level of hatred would not have been so venomous. On the contrary, Israel would have been more secure and more at peace with its neighbors. Indeed, Israel's continued illegal occupation of the Palestinian Territories and the Golan Heights provided the context, reason, and motivation, as some argue, for the creation of both Hezbollah and Hamas, although others assert that they are originally terrorist groups. At a Beirut Summit in March 2002, all 22 Arab nations offered to normalize relations with Israel if it agreed to abide by UN resolutions to end its occupation of Arab lands. We are dismayed at Israel's consistent rejection of UN resolutions and their continued use of illegal tactics in handling all affairs relating to the life of the Palestinian people. We are also horrified at the photographs of Israeli children autographing warheads before they are fired on Lebanon.

LEBANON

Naturally, we condemn Hezbollah and Palestinian terrorist tactics, especially when they target innocent civilians. All terroristic activities should come to a final end.

At the time of writing this letter, the USA remains isolated from most of its allies by rejecting calls for an immediate cease-fire. Furthermore, the present administration has chosen to actively aid the Israeli bombing campaign by rushing a delivery of satellite and laser-guided bombs to Israel (The New York Times, July 22, 2006). We are appalled and angered by the Administration's refusal to acknowledge that Israel's response has been entirely disproportionate. The US backing of Israel's defiance of world

opinion has fed the anger and despair of many in the Arab and Muslim worlds for years. We do not believe that a military campaign of any magnitude can eliminate terrorism. On the contrary, violence can only breed more violence.

It was wrong to have Israeli soldiers killed and kidnapped across the Lebanese-Israeli border by Hezbollah. It was equally wrong to do that without first informing the Lebanese government about the intended action. The whole episode could have been averted. This makes it all the more imperative to have all illegal and terroristic activities on all sides come to an abrupt and final end.

The foreign minister and deputy prime minister of Turkey sums up our feelings about Lebanon when he states that "... my generation grew up with an image of the United States as standing for the revered values of democracy. It is sad that this image of a 'kinder, gentler nation' is being tarnished as millions around the world watch in complete horror as events unfold in Lebanon. ... Throughout the world, the same question is being asked: Why has the sole superpower, which alone has the capability to stop this tragedy, turned a blind eye to the images of human suffering and a deaf ear to the cries of mercy?" (The Washington Post, August 3, 2006)

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The root cause of the escalation of the conflict is Israel's continued occupation of Arab territories. There is no legitimate reason for Israel's refusal to end its illegal occupation. There is no convincing excuse for Israel not to accept all the UN resolutions and the unanimous Arab states' initiative to end the conflict. Equally scandalous is the USA's biased and unconditional support of Israel's hawkish posture toward its neighbors. This is neither in America's interest nor in Israel's immediate or long-term interest.

Hence, we add our voice to the many Jewish peace groups (in Israel and around the world) and other religious and secular organizations who have been calling for an end to Israel's occupation as the first real step toward a genuine peace in the region. We commit ourselves and our resources to active engagement in seeking and pursuing peace in the Middle East.

We call on all Americans (particularly our own denomination, the Presbyterian Church, USA) to urge the US Government to fundamentally change its foreign policy toward the Middle East. It is time to base US foreign policy on the legal and moral values that our nation and constitution are founded on. We pledge ourselves to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel of God's love and a voice to just peace and reconciliation in the USA and the Middle East.

The Executive Committee of the
Presbyterian Middle Eastern Caucus