



The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Review of Peacemaking Issues at the 219th General Assembly

With peacemaking overtures and reports on the agendas of at least a half dozen General Assembly committees, hundreds of commissioners will have the opportunity to help develop positions on these issues for consideration in plenary sessions. The Israel-Palestine conflict continues to attract the most interest, but the General Assembly will also consider such important and provocative issues as gun violence, economic justice, Christian-Muslim relations, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the situation in Colombia, and future directions for peacemaking in the Presbyterian Church. The Peace Fellowship has prepared this brief overview for commissioners, advisory delegates, and observers who will be working on or following these critical national and international concerns.

Committee 13: Peacemaking and International Issues

13-01, 13-02, 13-03, 13-09 On the War in Afghanistan.

Seven presbyteries have submitted or concurred with similar overtures calling upon the United States to replace military operations in Afghanistan with nonviolent approaches, including diplomacy and material aid, and to mitigate the war's impact through restitution and reconstruction. We also need to evaluate the cost of the war to ourselves in financial, moral, and human terms in the hope that we can learn to engage in international affairs in ways that nourish peace, prosperity, and stability.

The rationale points out that no General Assembly has yet addressed the nine-year war in Afghanistan, now the longest war in U.S. history. There has been no directive to the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program to develop informational and study materials regarding the conflict, and **the voice of the church has been silent in a world waiting for its religious bodies to speak out. It is time for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be heard.**

13-05 On Protecting Christians in the Muslim World.

Growing out of a presbytery relationship, this overture is based on a particular situation in Pakistan, but uses general language to appeal to the United Nations to "exhort the religious and political leaders of Muslim nations to moderate extreme behavior and protect (their) religious minorities from ...harm, and encourage brotherly harmony...." While the concern merits the GA's attention, there are several problems with the overture. Most importantly, it fails to set a comprehensive context that includes U.S. military operations in the region and the injustices or resentments that may have motivated attacks on perceived allies of the U.S. It also asks the U.N. to send a message to all Muslim nations, without documenting that the problem exists in more than a few.

There are several ways that the committee could respond responsibly to the overture. They could issue a statement dealing specifically with the incident documented in the rationale. They could request assistance from committee resource staff in drafting a broader statement on the situation in Pakistan, including this concern. Or they might con-

sider requesting a report to the next General Assembly on the complicated situation in Pakistan.

13-06 On Entering a Six-Year Term of Discernment to Seek Clarity on Whether God Is Calling the Church to Embrace Nonviolence as Its Response to War and Terror.

This overture proposes a study that could lead to profound changes in the church's thinking on war and violence. It challenges us to consider reaffirming the early church's commitment to nonviolence and to reevaluate our reliance on just war doctrines. While Presbyterian polity will always permit a General Assembly to endorse a particular military option, **shouldn't the presumptive position of the church be in opposition to war?** The overture is not about the unrealistic hope of the United States becoming a pacifist nation. Instead, it asks questions about the role of the Christian perspective in national debates on war and peace. The rationale points out that modern weapons and military strategies have made traditional Just War theory obsolete. The PC(USA) has already declared that the threatened or actual use of nuclear weapons can never be just, but even the conventional wars of our time fail to protect civilians and cause lasting environmental damage. Nevertheless, the burden has generally been on war opponents to demonstrate that a particular conflict is unjust, rather than to its supporters to demonstrate that military action is the only realistic and just option. The decision does not need to be a rushed one, but shouldn't we start thinking about reversing that dynamic?

13-07 Twenty-first Century Peacemaking and Seminaries, Colleges, and Congregations.

This overture calls for several GAMC entities and church-related seminaries and colleges to investigate the possibility of pooling their resources to help Presbyterians deal with challenges in the 21st century, such as wars with no end (on terror or drugs) or those that rage in the Middle East, globalization and pluralism, U.S. foreign policy and developing nations, and climate change and the competition for natural resources. The foundational PC(USA) peacemaking document, "Peacemaking: the Believers' Calling" (1980) still calls us to the privilege and challenge of taking part in God's peacemaking in this century by assembling all the resources that God has given us. **The hope is that a very intentional plan may emerge from an explo-**

ration of how our agencies and educational institutions and congregations can comprehensively cooperate together.

13-08 On Assisting with a Process for Negotiation of a Peace Accord in Colombia.

The 2008 General Assembly called for a suspension of military aid to Colombia, which would preclude the expanded U.S. military presence which is the concern of this overture. It was the hope of our partner, the Presbyterian Church of Colombia (IPC), that the election of President Barack Obama would strengthen the search for peace and respect for human rights. This has not been the case. In September 2009, the government of the United States certified the Colombian government in human rights even with the revelation of a high number of extra-judicial killings of youth by the army. It was also made public that the Colombian intelligence agency conducted illegal surveillance on leaders of the opposition, human rights defenders, and church leaders, threatening them because of their work for peace. And now our government has made an accord with the Colombian government for the U.S. military to use seven military bases within Colombia.

In February 2010, the General Assembly of the IPC expressed its concern: "... that the democratic security promoted by the [Colombian] government, the increased military costs, and the growth of the army have not shown us the prospect of peace even though they have reduced the actions of illegal armed groups. It is evident that there is a resurgence or strengthening of former armed groups. Furthermore, there are tensions with Columbia's neighbors — Ecuador, Venezuela, and throughout the region — because of the announcement of the U.S. Army's use of Colombian military bases."

For this reason the IPC has called on the PC(USA) to join them in making stronger efforts toward peace in Colombia. In light of these new developments and this urgent request from our partner church, it is appropriate for the General Assembly to direct the stated clerk to **ask President Obama to suspend U.S. use of Colombian military bases and to instead promote a peace process to resolve the conflict.**

13-11 On Strengthening the Peacemaking Program

This overture would appoint a group of "experts" (mostly academics) to counsel the Peacemaking Program. An earlier elected advisory committee voted to disband so that Peacemaking Offering revenue could be devoted to staff, programs, and resources, not on meetings.



Committee 14: Middle East Peacemaking Issues

14-08 Breaking Down the Walls – From the Middle East Study Committee.

This report is at the heart of the work to be done by Committee 14 and by this General Assembly. It deals with a wide range of Middle East issues, and focuses mainly on Israel-Palestine. Its 41 pages entitled "We Bear Witness" lead into 9 pages of recommendations for our church and its members, our government, and all parties to the conflict. **These 50 pages are must reading for all commissioners.** The other 123 pages have valuable summaries of perspectives, history, the committee's process, GA policies, Presbyterian Panel results, and two recent documents from Palestinian Christians.

One recommendation has been the focus of special interest because it deals with corporate engagement. The report stops short of recommending divestment, but calls us to "invest positively, after due vetting, in sustainable economic development projects for the West Bank and Gaza (that do not support the occupation) sponsored by Palestinians or jointly by Palestinians and Israelis in equitable partnership." There is a partial endorsement of "Kairos Palestine" (see 14-05) along with an admission that the study group's recommendations fail to meet its call for economic solidarity in the form of divestment and boycott of everything produced by the occupation. GA will be able to deal directly with the divestment issue as it considers a separate MRTI report and two overtures on that topic. Focus on this issue should not detract from attention to all the recommendations, which could help the church make a significant contribution to justice and peace across the region.

14-01 and 14-02 - On Divestment from Caterpillar, Inc. and 14-03 - the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Report of Its Engagement with Corporations Involved in Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank.

Both overtures call for disinvestment from Caterpillar by the Presbyterian Foundation and Board of Pensions, and for no reinvestment unless MRTI is satisfied that Caterpillar no longer sells equipment to Israel that is used in illegal actions such as building settlements and walls on Palestinian land and destroying Palestinian property. They commend the Church of England and Hampshire College for divesting. 14-02 adds that the Israeli occupation should end for the sake of justice and to prevent the extinction of Christianity in the region. It states that when shareholder engagement has not succeeded, the church's integrity calls for not profiting from injustice (and therefore divestment), following a path similar to the campaign against South African apartheid.

The MRTI Report begins by citing GA policy: "...all corporations doing business in the region [should] confine their business activity solely to peaceful pursuits, and refrain from allowing their products or services to support or facilitate violent acts by Israelis or Palestinians against innocent civilians, construction and maintenance of settlements or Israeli-only roads in East Jerusalem and the

West Bank, the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory, and construction of the Separation Barrier as it extends beyond the 1967 'Green Line' into Palestinian territories." Corporate engagement with Motorola, ITT, United Technologies, and Hewlett-Packard are to continue, in light of some positive responses. But Caterpillar "has produced, sold, and profited from equipment that has been and continues to be used ... for clearly non-peaceful purposes.... Caterpillar's unwillingness to engage with authenticity and openness is unique and disappointing." The report then "strongly denounces Caterpillar's continued profit-making from non-peaceful uses of a number of its products."

Since that report was written, Caterpillar took action to have its distributors stop selling to Iran, due to concerns over Iran's nuclear program. The company has not taken similar action in Israel-Palestine. and remains, after over 5 years of corporate engagement, non-compliant with PC(USA) policy. **In the face of such non-compliance, divestment (as called for in the two overtures but not the MRTI report) is the course needed now.**

14-04 – On Recognition that Israel's Laws, Policies, and Practices Constitute Apartheid Against the Palestinian People.

The overture directs the Stated Clerk to encourage the United Nations to find that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid, and to send this information to the president and the Congress. It urges all Presbyterians and especially the Office of Interfaith Relations to study this matter and work to end apartheid. Finally, it directs the GAMC to prepare resources and urge study about Israel's occupation of Palestinian land.

The rationale is based upon the *International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid*, adopted by the UN in 1973. **The argument is made that the UN should expand the definition of the crime of apartheid to apply to the State of Israel instead of only to individuals.** In many discussions in Israel, in the U.S. and elsewhere, comparisons as well as contrasts have been made between South African apartheid and the conditions imposed by Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands.

By passing this overture, GA will help bring the principles of this Convention to bear on the crisis, in the service of arriving at a decent and just life for all the people of Israel-Palestine.

14-05 On Commending "A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith and Hope from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering" as an Advocacy Tool.

This overture calls upon the GA to *receive* an ecumenical statement from Christian Palestinians, known as *Kairos Palestine 2009*, and *commend* it for study and advocacy by presbyteries and congregations, and especially by the Office of Interfaith Relations in discussions with Jewish and Muslim groups. The first sentence of the rationale states: "This is the first time we have a common voice from the grassroots Christians in Palestine asking us to help them get rid of the occupation through concrete acts: theological debates on occupation as sin, and boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaigns." The 10 ½ page document is included in the rationale. (NOTE: "Receiving" a document implies a

general recognition and appreciation of the statement, rather than acceptance of all aspects of the statement.)

Palestinian Christians, and their Jewish and Muslim partners in the quest for a just peace, have made another statement similar to the Amman Call of 2007, which was endorsed and affirmed by the 118th GA (2008). This *Kairos* document brings up to date the descriptions of the conditions of occupation, rejects violence from any quarter, and furthermore calls for "companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. We understand this to integrate the logic of peaceful resistance. These advocacy campaigns must be carried out with courage, openly sincerely proclaiming that their object is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice."

Although the Israeli lobby has been critical of much of the document's contents, it represents the authentic and unified voice of Palestinian Christians. **By receiving and commending this document, the 219th GA will assure that it receives the attention it deserves in Presbyterian congregations.**

14-06 On Middle East Peacemaking.

Perhaps emerging from a weariness with controversy, this overture calls on the GA to answer all overtures concerning Israel and Palestine with a statement that, in recognition of the complex and changing conditions, it is best to take no actions that appear to support either side. PC(USA) leadership should influence peacemaking through prayer, tolerance and reconciliation, advocating step-by-step negotiation toward a two-state solution, condemning all terrorism and unwarranted violence, and providing assistance to innocent victims. The GAMC is to make sure that all staff abide by the directives, and the whole church is urged to pray and conscientiously support the overall welfare of all in the Middle East and the world

While these statements may sound faithful, they do little more than assure the continuation of the statements and processes that have been in place for many years, and that have ended neither the violence of Israel's occupation nor the violence of Palestinian rhetoric and actions. Passing the recommendations of the Middle East Study Committee report and overtures that sensitively support or carry forward those initiatives, plus supporting the Palestinian Christians' *Kairos* Document and the United Nation's Goldstone Report – these are the ways to be faithful in difficult times.

14-06 Toward Peace and Reconciliation in the Middle East.

This overture from Baltimore Presbytery calls for the GA to join in international efforts to investigate possible violations of international law by both sides during Israel's military action in Gaza, Dec. '08 – Jan. '09. A United Nations report in Sept. 2009 called for independent investigations of both Israel and Hamas. This recommendation has not been implemented. The US Congress voted in Nov. 2009 to oppose implementation of this report, known as the Goldstone Report, after the name of the Jewish South African jurist who led the investigation. The 575-page report alleges extreme violations of international hu-

man rights and humanitarian law. The Middle East Study Committee report has many references to Gaza, but does not address this particular concern, probably due to the fact that they were not allowed to visit Gaza. **Passing this overture will join PC(USA) with those calling for the parties to conduct their own investigations, and keep alive our church's long-standing commitment to the rule of law in the Israel-Palestine crisis and our calling for accountability whenever violence occurs.**

14-09 On Seeking Compliance to U.S. Government Policy in the Use of Military Aid by All Parties in the Middle East.

This overture calls for the application of U.S. law, as well as international law and human rights protections, to all military aid to the region. The main value is that it makes very explicit long-standing church policy and two recommendations of the Middle East Study Committee.

14-07 On Iraq.

This overture calls for prayer for the churches, all who grieve, Iraqis as they rebuild, and refugees. It commends the GAMC for keeping us informed about Iraqi churches, Presbyterian Women for their Birthday Offering grant to a Kirkuk church child care program, and those ministering to Iraqi refugees. It directs the GAMC to continue support in these ways and asks the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to study the costs of the war related to the US economy. **While commending it for some actions, it calls for the US to maintain the announced schedules for withdrawal of troops and contractors, to have no permanent bases, to provide more and quicker help for refugees, and to provide more medical and psychological help for military personnel.**

With its position that the US maintain its stated withdrawal goals this overture would strengthen the 2008 GA position, which did not set a firm limit to the length of the occupation.

The Other Committees

As peacemakers, we are concerned not only with responding to international military conflicts, but also with ending violence in all its forms, promoting harmony among neighbors, addressing injustice and relieving suffering. While almost every item on the General Assembly agenda will touch on some aspect of these concerns, a few deserve extra attention. We list them here, and encourage you to consult our website (www.presbypeacefellowship.org) or visit our exhibit hall booth for a more complete review.

Committee 8: Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

Item *08-02 On Removing the Confusing and Theologically Incompatible Call for Presbyterians to Engage Other Faith*, tries to explain why we can not and should not pray or celebrate holidays with Muslims. Items 08-03 and 08-04 are commissioned reports providing background for cooperation and conversation with Jews and Muslims. Overture 08-09 would refer both reports for rework, especially because the paper "Christians and Jews: People of God"

contains an "occupation theology" bias. It is important to read the Israel Palestine Mission Network memo attached to the rationale of this overture. **Please visit our website at www.presbypeacefellowship.org for a fuller discussion of this very complex issue.**

Committee 9: Mission Coordination

Overture *09-03 On Amending the Process for Forming Social Witness Policy* calls for sending drafts of resolutions to presbyteries and distributing their comments to commissioners in order to warn them in advance about potential controversial recommendations. (Overture *08-09*, for example, discusses a report that might have benefitted from a more open process.) However, this particular solution might have the unfortunate effect of giving an official voice to unstudied opinions.

Committee 10: Social Justice Issues A: The Promotion of Social Righteousness

10 - 06 A Resolution to Study Violence Against Women and Children on the Mexico-U.S. Border addresses a serious situation in Ciudad Juárez, but border violence has escalated well beyond attacks on women in one city. It is important that we find completely nonmilitary solutions to this growing problem. *10-09 and 10-10 Living Through Economic Crisis: The Church's Witness in Troubled Times*, and *Neither Poverty Nor Riches: Compensation, Equity, and the Unity of the Church* are important reports from ACSWP which turn needed attention to economic justice issues, including the effects of the economic downturn and compensation ratios in the church (the recommended 5:1 ratio of highest to lowest salaries is a considerable challenge to the corporate style salaries of some church agencies).

Committee 11: Social Justice Issues B: the Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World

11 - 02 On Endorsing "The Charter for Compassion" lifts up a document that says "any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate."

11-06 Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call advocates incremental improvements in policy and offers many practical ways to involve congregations in reducing gun violence.

11-07 On Living a Human Life Before God will disappoint some in not taking direct positions on war, hunger, genocide, and abortion, but provides some helpful theological foundations for local discussions.

11-03 On Making Resources Available Regarding Destruction and Loss of Coastal Wetlands could provide a vehicle for the GA to add its own statement about the environmental crisis caused by the BP oil spill.

11-08 On a National Moratorium on the Imposition of the Death Penalty points out that our legal system cannot currently ensure that innocent people will not be executed.