

BREAKING DOWN THE WALLS: A CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE

The National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel (NCLCI) was founded in 1978 to develop, encourage and strengthen understanding and support for the people, land and State of Israel within the North American Christian community. NCLCI is a broad-based network of Christian leaders – Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical and independent – whose goal is advocacy for Israel, dialogue and mutual respect in a non-proselytizing spirit. The following statement was issued at its May 2010 Executive Committee meeting in Minneapolis.

Beginning in the 1960s, mainline Protestant denominations, including the Presbyterian Church (USA), began to engage in constructive dialogue that profoundly altered the Christian-Jewish relationship from misunderstanding and antagonism to one of growing understanding and respect. This dialogue led to the adoption of theological positions that acknowledged and repented of views that denied God's ongoing covenant with the Jewish people and fostered antisemitism.

Unfortunately, recent proposals considered by some major church bodies are now threatening to undermine authentic dialogue and mutual Christian-Jewish understanding. If implemented, these proposals pose a real threat to the security and integrity of Israel and Jewish peoplehood; the credibility of our churches; and the long-range prosperity, security and independence of the Palestinian people.

Specifically, a number of proposals found in the PCUSA Middle East Task Force report, *Breaking Down the Walls*, contain serious flaws that would cause great harm.

These include:

- Alluding to democratic Israel as an apartheid state – an unjust and toxic slur. Such language ignores the broad diversity of peoples and nationalities whose human and civil rights and opportunities are guaranteed by Israeli law. At the same time this charge demeans the tragic and inhumane suffering of South Africans under apartheid.

- Highlighting the “occupation” as the root cause of the conflict in Israel/Palestine and in the region, while minimizing the constant threat of terror and Arab rejection of a Jewish State in the Middle East. In the process Israel’s repeated and well-documented willingness to offer major concessions for peace is ignored.
- Recommending the adoption of the Kairos Palestine document of December 11, 2009, that would effectively end the viability of the Jewish homeland in Israel, calling for divestment and economic boycott as well as an open return of all Palestinian refugees.
- Calling for an immediate cessation of the “blockade” of Gaza without specifying how the flow of weapons being used against Israel would cease, and ignoring positive Israeli actions such as providing a steady flow of food and medical supplies into Gaza on a daily basis and enabling Gaza produce to reach international markets.
- Supporting the establishment of “an international council” for Jerusalem, an arrangement that has never worked in any other venue where it has been tried, i.e. Berlin, Danzig, Trieste and others.

We urge the Presbyterian General Assembly to recognize the complexity of these issues; to reject the highly flawed report of the Middle East Study Committee, *Breaking Down the Walls*; and to maintain the balanced and sensitive approach to reconciliation that have informed and guided the church’s best decisions in the past.