

Item 12-02 -- Overture 04-33 On Calling for an End to the Construction of a Wall by the State of Israel

On Calling for an End to the Construction of a Wall by the State of Israel—From the Presbytery of Chicago.

Assembly Action

The Assembly voted to adopt the Committee recommendation to approve the item with amendment and comment. (471/34/6)

Committee Action

The Assembly Committee voted to approve the recommendation, with amendment and comment (65/3/0):

[Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through and with brackets; text to be added or inserted is shown with an underline and with brackets.]

~~“[The Presbytery of Chicago respectfully overtures]~~ [Recognizing that God’s love as evidenced in Jesus Christ is for all God’s children, and recognizing the human rights of all people to God’s resources including land and water and livelihood,] the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) ~~[tø]~~ [requests] ~~[that]~~ the Stated Clerk make known to the president of the United States, the members of Congress of the United States, [and] the State of Israel[, and the Palestinian National Authority] its opposition to the construction of a wall and other barriers by the State of Israel and further to make known the desire of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that the United States of America make no monetary contribution to the 1.3 billion dollar cost of the construction of this wall, construction of which has already begun and will continue for several years.”

Comment: The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has approved numerous resolutions on Israel and Palestine, repeatedly affirming, clearly and unequivocally, Israel’s right to exist within permanent, recognized, and “secure” borders (for example: 1969, 1974, 1977, 1983, 1989, etc.). It has deplored the cycle of escalating violence carried out by both Palestinians and Israelis which is rooted in Israel’s continued occupation of Palestinian territories (cf. statements of successive assemblies since 1967). Presbyterians have continued to be concerned about the loss of so many innocent lives of Israelis and Palestinians (see “Resolution on the Middle East,” approved in 1997, and “Resolution on Israel and Palestine: End the Occupation Now,” approved in 2003).

Because of its deep concern for peace in the area, and how the “Separation Barrier,” generally referred to as the “Security Wall,” is impacting the lives of people on both sides, the GAC expresses grave alarm at the construction of this barrier. Further, given the long-standing, deeply rooted spiritual and programmatic bonds existing between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its partner churches in the Holy Land, it is particularly

concerned that the life and ministry of the dwindling remnant of the Christian community will be severely impeded. As it voices these concerns within the framework of many General Assembly statements over more than thirty-five years, the GAC wants to help Presbyterians to understand some of the aspects of the wall's impact. These may be summarized as follows:

- ⟨ The "Separation Barrier," currently under construction, consists of a twenty-five-foot high concrete wall meandering through mostly Palestinian lands, plus stretches of electrified barbed-wire fence extensions of the wall.
- ⟨ Israel claims it is building the wall between Israel and the West Bank, but only 10 percent will be on the Green Line (i.e., Israel's 1967 border).
- ⟨ Ninety percent of the rest stretches into the West Bank, isolates significant amounts of land, and affects the lives of many thousands of Palestinians. This year approximately 210,000 people will be economically and socially cut off from their neighborhoods, their families, their farmlands, their employment, their educational and health-care facilities, and their places of worship.
- ⟨ A wall built along the Green Line would be half the length of the current wall and much easier to patrol.

Many believe that the route of the wall has been determined not by security, but by the political goals of maintaining the settlements and impacting future peace talks. Palestinian church partners have expressed the view that they might not object to the construction of a wall if it were built on Israeli land. The current wall ghettoizes the Palestinians and forces them onto what can only be called reservations.

The General Assembly Council is engaged in various ministries that support the Christian churches and ecumenical bodies in their own work of evangelism, outreach and church growth, health ministries, education, economic and social development, peacemaking, interfaith dialogue, reconciliation, and cooperation.

Especially following a recent visit by an official PC(USA) delegation to Israel and Palestine (in February 2004), the GAC believes that the best hope for security for both Israelis and Palestinians may be found in laying down all forms of aggression on both sides, ending the Israeli occupation, and finding ways to build bridges of peace rather than walls of separation. Good neighborly relations, rather than mutual isolation and suspicion, are urgently needed between Israel and its neighbors in Palestine and the Middle East.

Recommendation

The Presbytery of Chicago respectfully overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to request that the Stated Clerk make known to the president of the United States, the members of Congress of the United States, and the State of Israel its opposition to the construction of a wall and other barriers by the State of Israel and further to make known the desire of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that the United States of America make no monetary contribution to the 1.3 billion dollar cost

of the construction of this wall, construction of which has already begun and will continue for several years.

Rationale

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever. (Jer., 7:5-7)

President George W. Bush has called for an end to Israel's construction of the wall that separates Israel from the Palestinian Territories (November 2003) and United Nations Secretary Kofi Annan has condemned the building of the wall as a "deeply counterproductive act" that "could damage the longer term prospects for peace."

The wall adversely affects the economy, education, social relationships, and medical care of Palestinians.

The wall devastates the Palestinian economy, which is based on agriculture, because it separates Palestinian farmers from their land making crop cultivation an impossibility. It renders previously productive land unproductive because the wall separates land from the waters that are necessary for irrigation. And, those farmers who are able to access their land and raise crops are now unable to sell their produce because the isolates them from their markets.

Since many farmers are unable to reach and cultivate their land because of the construction of the wall, their land is in effect confiscated by the order of the Israeli High Court, which states that land that is uncultivated for three years is subject to seizure by the Israeli government and lost to its owners. Moreover, Palestinian farmers typically are notified of the confiscation of their land only by military orders that are nailed to a tree or dropped on their inaccessible land.

Village life is imperiled. Because of the wall, some villages no longer have access to their wells and are therefore unable to sustain human life. Homes, schools, and shops are being destroyed to make way for construction equipment and the wall itself. Palestinian villagers are being confined to their communities by the wall and an accompanying system of permit requirements that control their movement and isolate them in areas defined by the State of Israel. The wall and its accompanying depth barriers (trenches 25 meters wide filled with barbed wire) and checkpoints create sealed Palestinian communities that over time will be unable to sustain their populations.

The wall extends well beyond the Green Line and makes significant incursions into traditional Palestinian territories as defined in 1967. On at least one occasion, Prime Minister Sharon stated his intention to treat the wall as the new territorial border.

The construction of the wall and the wall itself cause the destruction of homes, schools, medical facilities, markets, trees, and infrastructure. The social structure of the Palestinian communities is shredded and ultimately its residents are banished from their land.

The wall humiliates, demoralizes, frustrates, and angers the Palestinian people and ultimately decreases the security of Israel and its citizens fostering a sense of hopelessness and despair.

Comment on Item 12-02 -- From the General Assembly Council.

The General Assembly Council urges the commissioners to approve Item 12-02 with the following comment:

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has approved numerous resolutions on Israel and Palestine, repeatedly affirming, clearly and unequivocally, Israel's right to exist within permanent, recognized, and "secure" borders (for example: 1969, 1974, 1977, 1983, 1989, etc.). It has deplored the cycle of escalating violence carried out by both Palestinians and Israelis which is rooted in Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories (cf. statements of successive assemblies since 1967). Presbyterians have continued to be concerned about the loss of so many innocent lives of Israelis and Palestinians (see "Resolution on the Middle East," approved in 1997, and "Resolution on Israel and Palestine: End the Occupation Now," approved in 2003).

Because of its deep concern for peace in the area, and how the "Separation Barrier," generally referred to as the "Security Wall," is impacting the lives of people on both sides, the GAC expresses grave alarm at the construction of this barrier. Further, given the long-standing, deeply rooted spiritual and programmatic bonds existing between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its partner churches in the Holy Land, it is particularly concerned that the life and ministry of the dwindling remnant of the Christian community will be severely impeded. As it voices these concerns within the framework of many General Assembly statements over more than thirty-five years, the GAC wants to help Presbyterians to understand some of the aspects of the wall's impact. These may be summarized as follows:

⟨ The "Separation Barrier," currently under construction, consists of a twenty-five-foot high concrete wall meandering through mostly Palestinian lands, plus stretches of electrified barbed-wire fence extensions of the wall.

⟨ Israel claims it is building the wall between Israel and the West Bank, but only 10 percent will be on the Green Line (i.e., Israel's 1967 border).

⟨ Ninety percent of the rest stretches into the West Bank, isolates significant amounts of land, and affects the lives of many thousands of Palestinians. This year approximately 210,000 people will be economically and socially cut off from their neighborhoods, their families, their farmlands, their employment, their educational and health-care facilities, and their places of worship.

⟨ A wall built along the Green Line would be half the length of the current wall and much easier to patrol.

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Especially following a recent visit by an official PC(USA) delegation to Israel and Palestine (in February 2004), the GAC believes that the best hope for security for both Israelis and Palestinians may be

found in laying down all forms of aggression on both sides, ending the Israeli occupation, and finding ways to build bridges of peace rather than walls of separation. Good neighborly relations, rather than mutual isolation and suspicion, are urgently needed between Israel and its neighbors in Palestine and the Middle East.

Advice and Counsel on Item 12-02 -- From the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) and the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC).

Item 12-02 calls for an end to the construction of a wall by the State of Israel.

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) and the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) advise that Item 12-02 be approved with the General Assembly Council (GAC) comment on Item 12-02, shown above.