



On June 15, 2006, the 217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will convene in Birmingham, Alabama. We believe that this General Assembly should take steps to insure positive investment for peace with respect to Israelis and Palestinians, whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, in the Middle East.

Overtures to the General Assembly require the support of a presbytery or synod, but they typically begin with a single congregation, acting through a Session. We therefore offer the following proposal to you:

RESOLVED, that the Session of the Brick Presbyterian Church in the City of New York asks that the Presbytery of New York City approve and adopt the following overture to the 217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

RECOMMENDATION

The Presbytery of New York City overtures the 217th General Assembly (2006), to urge the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment, the Worldwide Ministries Division, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, and all other appropriate bodies within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to actively foster peace, reconciliation, and community development between Israelis and Palestinians. This should involve the intentional use of the funds of the church in two ways to support social, economic, and cultural integration of their communities: first, to explore ways to partner with non-governmental organizations, and to support church-related mission efforts, that seek to promote the peaceful and productive living together of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Israelis and Palestinians; and, second, to explore ways to invest in for-profit enterprises that actively engender peaceful cooperation by Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East through such enterprises' own hiring practices, specific projects, and specific investments.



RATIONALE

1. *“Blessed are the peacemakers”* Matthew 5:9.

2. *This overture advances the goal of peace between Israelis and*

Palestinians expressed by many prior General Assemblies. Since at least 1948, Presbyterians have sought peace in the Middle East through a “return to the principle of faithful devotion to the welfare, needs, and rights of both the Jewish and Arab peoples.” 160th General Assembly (1948).¹ Consistent with this plea, prior General Assemblies have approved numerous resolutions unequivocally affirming Israel’s right to exist within secure borders (1969, 1974, 1977, 1983, 1989),² and seeking peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, *e.g.*, Resolution on Urging Sustainable Peace Between Israelis and Palestinians, 214th General Assembly (2002).³

¹ See

[http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll/socialpolicy/chapter00005.htm/section00011.htm/sub-section00034.htm?f=templates\\$fn=document-frame.htm\\$3.0\\$q=\\$x=\\$up=1\\$nc=1950\\$vid=default](http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll/socialpolicy/chapter00005.htm/section00011.htm/sub-section00034.htm?f=templates$fn=document-frame.htm$3.0$q=$x=$up=1$nc=1950$vid=default).

² See, *e.g.*, <http://www.pcusa.org/stepstowardpeace/history.htm>,

³ See <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/sustainablepeace.htm>.



3. *This overture advances the goal of mutual respect between and among Christians (and particularly Presbyterians) and our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters.*

The means for the church to accomplish the ends of peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians are many. In addition, as thoughtful documents such as the 1987 position paper adopted for study and reflection by the 199th General Assembly on “Towards a Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews”, and the actions on Islamic study taken by the 198th and 199th General Assemblies in 1986 and 1987 indicate, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is committed to continuing and deepening relationships with Jews and Muslims. In the past two years, however, the discussion of the issue of peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, and the related issue of the relation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) with Judaism in particular, has been focused heavily on whether and how the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should sell certain investments as a means to accomplish these ends. The General Assembly Action Resolution on Israel and Palestine: Initiating Divestment and Ending Occupation, 216th General Assembly (2004),⁴ regardless of its merits, has directed more attention within the Church to resolving conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East. However, both the content of the resolution and the process by which it was adopted caused genuine distress in the Jewish community in the United States and damaged relationships between Jews and Presbyterians. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is and must continue to be committed to healing these relationships, whether it continues to pursue a policy of divestment or not.

⁴ See <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/israelpalestineresolution.htm#1>.



4. *This overture does not depend on or preclude other choices to accomplish the ends of peace and reconciliation in the world.* Whatever the conscience of any member or body of the Church with respect to support for or opposition to divestment as a peacemaking strategy, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is also committed to the consideration of other means to peace through investment. For example, the 183rd General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (1971), saw, in the command of the Confession of 1967 that the church “commend to the nations as practical policies the search for cooperation and peace”, a need to implement this truth through Corporate and Social Responsibility Investment Policy Guidelines.⁵ Five years later, the 116th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. (1976) approved Investment Policy Guidelines for the General Assembly Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.⁶ Those guidelines provided that the church should consider “[c]ontributions toward peace and humanitarian concerns rather than excessive reliance on military solutions to human, social, or economic problems at home and abroad.”⁷ As to investor actions, those guidelines also listed as the *first* action for consideration the decision of “[i]nvesting or declining to invest.”⁸ While the 197th General Assembly (1985) adopted a plan of “[p]hased, selective divestment” as a particular process for addressing issues raised by the 196th General Assembly (1984) in relation to existing holdings in corporations doing business in

⁵ See <http://www.pcusa.org/mrti/pdf/1971-responsible-investing.pdf> (quoting subsection 9.45).

⁶ See <http://www.pcusa.org/mrti/pdf/1976-responsible-investing.pdf>.

⁷ *Id.* (“Social Factor Criteria” subsection e).

⁸ *Id.* (“Investor Actions” subsection 1).



South Africa,⁹ the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has never rejected the primacy of *initial* investment decisions as a means of social responsibility and peacemaking.

5. *This overture does not depend on or preclude other choices that may be made to accomplish the ends of peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.* In addition to its general position on investment policy actions, from time to time the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has also been specific about investment and funding for peace between Israelis and Palestinians in ways other than divestment. For example, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy recommended to the 209th General Assembly (1997), with respect to issues of peace in the Middle East, that “the United States government, other governments, the United Nations, international development agencies and financial institutions, and private entities, . . . cooperate fully in building more productive, sustainable, self-reliant, and socially equitable agricultural systems throughout the Middle East.”¹⁰ Similarly, that Committee recommended that “the international community generally . . . provide greater technical assistance and financial investment for appropriate water infrastructure in the region.”¹¹ The General Assembly adopted these recommendations. Yet while many who support this overture believe that such positive investment offers a *better* strategy than divestment for using the resources of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to further peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians (while at the same time rebuilding relationships between the church and Jewish and Muslim communities), this overture is independent of that question.

⁹ See <http://www.pcusa.org/mrti/whatisdivestment.htm>.

¹⁰ See <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/israelpalestine/resolution.htm> (“Recommendations” subsection 1(f)(1)).

¹¹ *Id.* (“Recommendations” subsection 1(g)(3)).



6. *This overture does not improperly restrict the kinds of investments that may be used to accomplish the ends of peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.* Consistent with the past actions described above, and with the larger views of the seminal 1974 General Assembly position that “Israel should assure full political rights and the right to effective participation in public life to all Israeli Arabs” and “Arab countries should assure and foster full participation by minority religious, ethnic, and national communities in political, social, and economic life”, 186th General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.(1974),¹² the current General Assembly should urge positive financial investment and funding in efforts likely to bring Israelis and Palestinians together. This should include not only non-governmental activity, but investment in for-profit businesses, and recognizes that such investment can be part of a peace-making process. For example, reports made in 2004 declared that over 60% of all Palestinians are unemployed. *E.g.*, Statement by the Reverend Jennifer Butler, Co-chair of the NGO Working Group on Israel/Palestine on behalf of the International Coordinating Network on Palestine (United Nations, Nov. 29, 2004).¹³ Companies whose hiring policies foster reduction of such unemployment and the integration of Israeli and Palestinian workers—Christian, Muslim, and Jewish—on equal terms should, all other things being equal, be favored for investment over companies with poorer policies or results. The current overture urges such consideration in investment and funding.

¹² *See* [http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll/socialpolicy/chapter00005.htm/section00011.htm/sub-section00034.htm?f=templates\\$fn=document-frame.htm\\$3.0\\$q=\\$x=\\$y=\\$z=\\$1\\$nc=1950\\$vid=default](http://index.pcusa.org/NXT/gateway.dll/socialpolicy/chapter00005.htm/section00011.htm/sub-section00034.htm?f=templates$fn=document-frame.htm$3.0$q=$x=$y=$z=1nc=1950$vid=default).

¹³ *See* <http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/un/solidarity.pdf>.



7. *This overture does not directly affect the work or budget of a General Assembly entity.* Although this overture does not require or forbid any expenditure or change any existing duty of any General Assembly entity, the proponents of this overture would expect to consult on this overture with the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment, the Worldwide Ministries Division, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy.