

SOURCE DOCUMENT COVER PAGE

The Archives of the Episcopal Church
Acts of Convention 2012
Source Documentation for Resolution 2012-B019

Resolution Title: Support Israeli-Palestinian Peace

I. *Copyright 2014. The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.*

The digital copy provided here in *The Acts of Convention* is a digitally-encoded copy of The Archives of the Episcopal Church. All rights reserved. Limited reproduction of excerpts of documents generated by this database is permitted for personal, research, and educational activities by members and organizations of The Episcopal Church. Systematic or multiple copy reproduction; electronic retransmission or redistribution; print or electronic duplication of any material for a fee or for commercial purposes; altering or recompiling any contents of the database for electronic re-display, and all other re-publication that does not qualify as fair use are not permitted without prior written permission. This restriction is notwithstanding the author(s) full rights to ownership and duplication rights.

Send written requests for permission to re-publish to: DFMS Rights and Permissions Office, The Archives of the Episcopal Church USA, 606 Rathervue Place, P.O. Box 2247, Austin, Texas 78768. (Tel. 512-472-6816; Fax 512-480-0437).

II. *Digital Copy Note*

The following document is provided as a PDF document for educational reference and personal use only. This document is copy of HTML text authored by Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori and endorsed by the General Convention of The Episcopal Church. The original source document for the attached copy was found at <http://www.episcopalchurch.org>.

A Pastoral Letter on Israeli Palestinian Peace

 episcopalchurch.org/pb/pastoral-letter-israeli-palestinian-peace

Katharine Jefferts Schori

Monday, October 3, 2011

A PASTORAL LETTER ON ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

*On the holy mountain stands the city he has founded;
The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.
Of Zion it shall be said, "Everyone was born in her,
And the Most High himself shall sustain her."*

-- Psalm 87 (page 711, Book of Common Prayer)

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The events of recent weeks have drawn the minds of many around the world once again to the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict. New violence and hostility directed against the State of Israel from other neighbor states in the region, the continued expansion of Israeli settlements into the Palestinian territories, and the United Nations' expected consideration of the matter of Palestinian statehood all are reflections of the untenable nature of the present reality. While optimism for meaningful and constructive negotiation between the two parties dimmed over the past year, the events of recent weeks – and the new opportunities they may present -- invite us to reflect prayerfully on what each might do to bring new hope to those who live, move, and have their being within the daily reality of this conflict in the land called holy by all the children of Abraham.

I. The Present Moment

At the outset, it bears noting what The Episcopal Church has said repeatedly over the course of multiple decades: a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians can be achieved only by bilateral negotiations between the two parties themselves. This important principle was reaffirmed just last month by a joint communiqué of the Patriarchs and Heads of Local Churches in Jerusalem. The contours of what such negotiations must produce are as clear as ever: a two-state solution that provides for the security and universal recognition of Israel and the safety of all its people, the viability and territorial integrity of a state for the Palestinian people, and a sharing of the holy city of Jerusalem.

Unfortunately, the gulf between this outcome and the political and moral will needed to achieve it has proven wide. Only a year ago, hope existed that negotiations would commence, and that – particularly with the involvement of the President of the United States – the moment for a peaceful solution might finally have arrived. Tragically, the events of the past year have driven the parties further apart rather than closer together, leading some to question whether international efforts to support the peace process have lost credibility, and whether there is any meaningful path toward negotiations.

Yet even in the midst of such complexity and crisis, one can note two very powerful reasons to remain engaged. First, people on each side share a common dream for a future of peace and a common political support for the compromises necessary to achieve it. Second, even though each side is frustrated and

believes that the present moment is untenable, nearly all agree that a future without peace is more untenable still. New discussions by Israelis and Palestinians over this past weekend about a resumption of negotiations in the near future are a reminder that we must maintain hope and actively support those seeking to make peace.

If we can agree that a future without peace is no future at all, and that negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians themselves are the only way to bring about peace, we must ask what each of us can do to support the parties in beginning the journey toward peace together.

II. Palestinian Statehood and the United Nations

As our Church's Executive Council noted in a resolution passed in June, the Palestinian Authority's efforts toward recognition of statehood at the United Nations are a response to the impasse of the present moment. They are not a repudiation of the need for negotiations but a response to the absence of negotiations. Palestinians share with Israelis the pain and frustration of a conflict that has now entered its seventh decade but lack the political right of self-determination to which all people are entitled.

The question of how the community of nations should handle the bid for Palestinian recognition at the United Nations is more complex than whether a statehood resolution should be affirmed or rejected. What is clear is that the diplomatic isolation of Israel that could result from a vote in which only a handful of nations refuse recognition of Palestinian statehood would not be productive to achieving peace. At the same time, it is also clear that a vote in which the United States, as a principal international agent in the peace process, votes – either by itself or with other members of the Security Council – against even symbolic recognition of Palestinian statehood would be deeply unproductive.

The most responsible course for the United Nations would be for member states to think beyond the question of symbolic recognition of Palestinian statehood and instead offer a new, creative, and consequential proposal for a negotiations process that can produce durable and meaningful results. If the negotiations process is broken or has lost credibility – as indicated by nearly all present evidence – it is not only appropriate but imperative that world leaders, including Israeli and Palestinian leaders, work to fix it. The time for symbolic statements has passed. As the heads of local Churches in Jerusalem said in their recent statement, “negotiations are the best way to resolve all outstanding issues between the two sides,” and the moment to “intensify the prayers and diplomatic efforts for peace” is here.

I am encouraged by the actions of the Quartet for Middle East Peace – the United States, the United Nations, the European Union, and Russia – to respond to the Palestinian statehood resolution by putting forward a clear plan for the parties to come back to the negotiating table immediately. I am encouraged that both Israeli and Palestinian leaders have voiced openness to this course, and I am hopeful that the coming weeks will provide meaningful opportunities for each of us to support the parties in coming to the table.

III. What We Can Do

The question for each of us, then, is what we can do to contribute to the creation of peace in the Holy Land. How, in this case, do we live into our baptismal covenant to strive for justice and peace and promote the dignity of every human being?

We will ultimately need to address how to advocate with our own political leaders. But first I want to emphasize the particular responsibility we have as Christians to stand in solidarity with the Christian communities of the Holy Land who suffer the pains of the conflict and consistently act as agents of peacemaking. Bishop Suheil Dawani, the Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, at a recent conference in London on Holy Land Christians, put it this way, “As Christians, we are called to be peacemakers, to continue to

provide hope where it is dim, to be voices of the voiceless, and to be advocates for a just and durable peace. We must work together with people of other faiths to encourage the politicians to put politics aside and meet midway, where all people are equal; the marginalized and the powerful, the poor and the wealthy, men and women, children and the elderly, regardless of faith or social status.”

Unfortunately, the Christian presence in the Holy Land has declined precipitously over the course of the past several decades. The causes of this are complex and varied, and relate in many ways to the realities of the conflict that have afflicted the area and the surrounding communities. If we are to help sustain the Christian presence, the “living stones” in the land in which Our Lord walked and in which the Church was born, we must energetically support the Christian communities in their varied witness.

The Diocese of Jerusalem is involved in multiple critical initiatives to improve the life of all persons in the Holy Land, particularly through education, healthcare, and the creation of religious dialogue between people of each of the three great Abrahamic traditions. I encourage all Episcopalians to read [Bishop Dawani’s address](#)(1) to the London conference this summer, to learn more about the ministries of the Diocese of Jerusalem, and to prayerfully consider what you might do to support those ministries through partners like [Episcopal Relief and Development](#)(2) and the [American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem](#).(3)

Not only does financial investment in these ministries support the mission of the Church in the place of its birth, but it also helps the development of economic and social infrastructure in the Palestinian territories. In 2006 our Church affirmed this as key to the creation of a future Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

As Bishop Dawani reminds us, Christians also have a responsibility for advocacy with their governments, calling politicians into new and creative solutions midway between the old and stubborn positions that divide them.

As our government has the potential to be the single-largest external force in the resolution of the conflict, Americans have several clear steps we can take. In view of the Quartet’s proposal for immediate resumption of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, I am asking our Church’s Office of Government Relations in Washington to spearhead advocacy campaigns in the coming weeks around several key actions:

- Urging the President of the United States to devote significant diplomatic capital to working in the coming days and weeks to encourage Israeli and Palestinian leaders to come to the negotiating table around the parameters proposed by the Quartet. These include the resumption of direct negotiations within one month, agreement on borders and security within three months, and the resolution of all final-status issues by the end of 2012. It is vitally important that the President stand by the proposal for borders based on the 1967 lines, with accompanying land swaps, and that he insist that other critical issues not explicitly covered in the Quartet’s proposal – like the status of Jerusalem – play a central role in discussions.
- Urging that the President and the United States Congress reach an agreement to forego all efforts to cut funding to the Palestinian Authority as a response to their actions at the United Nations. Cutting aid would have disastrous consequences not just for Palestinians, but also for Israel and the region. Among other effects, it could end current security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which has allowed Israel to enjoy historically low levels of violence and terrorism in recent years. Prime Minister Netanyahu himself has expressed opposition to the termination of aid to the Palestinian Authority, and yet Congress has reiterated its threat to move forward with this course of action as a response to actions at the United Nations. Particularly as the parties themselves discuss the possibility of resuming negotiations, it is imperative that U.S.

lawmakers walk back from that threat, given the disastrous consequences it could produce. It must be made abundantly clear that aid to the Palestinian Authority is not only in the interest of Palestinians, but it is also very much in the interest of Israel and the United States.

- Urging the President to devote significant diplomatic energy to working with the Israeli government to once again implement a freeze on all settlement activity – within both the West Bank and Palestinian East Jerusalem – as a signal that it is serious about negotiations with the Palestinians. While the Quartet is correct to request negotiations without preconditions, it is clear that 1967 borders with land swaps are an essential component of a final peace agreement and that continued settlement building imperils the likelihood of coming to agreement. The Obama Administration spent much of its first year in office working, ultimately unsuccessfully, for a long-term settlement freeze in the West Bank, but abandoned those efforts after the Israeli government abandoned a limited-term freeze that had not succeeded in bringing the parties back to the table. President Obama must resume these efforts immediately, with the focus and seriousness shown earlier in his Administration.
- Urging that the President devote significant diplomatic energy to working with the Palestinian Authority to ensure that the sort of political reconciliation that will be required for a peace agreement is accompanied by strong and unequivocal assurances from the Palestinian Authority, and from all potential members of a future government, that the Palestinian Authority's recognition of Israel's right to exist and its condemnation of all violence against Israelis will remain undiminished. The Quartet proposal for negotiations calls for an agreement within three months not only on borders but also on security, and an unequivocal consensus among Palestinian leaders to reject violence and respect Israel's sovereignty and security will be necessary for this.

These acts of advocacy should be carried forth not only by our Church's representatives in Washington, but by each of us in the United States, and so I urge all U.S. Episcopalians to join the [Episcopal Public Policy Network](#),⁽⁴⁾ which will, in the coming weeks, lead grassroots advocacy actions around these important issues.

For Episcopalians who do not live in the United States, advocacy with their governments is no less important, and I encourage several additional advocacy responses:

- Urging your governments to support the Quartet's call for immediate negotiations, including the development of a concrete peace plan that can deliver results within clearly defined timeframes and with the clear accountability of all parties to those results;
- Urging robust aid to the Palestinian Authority from all donor governments. The European Union is currently the world's largest donor to the Palestinian Authority, but the Palestinian Authority's fiscal health is untenable in its present state and will grow much more so if the U.S. Congress blocks or reduces aid. The United Nations should encourage all member states with the ability to contribute to the Palestinian Authority to do so, particularly the several members of the Arab League who have made numerous pledges but have not yet honored them.
- Urging their governments to request that all governments that have withdrawn ambassadors from Israel, severed diplomatic ties with Israel, or failed to recognize Israel and its right to exist, reverse those decisions. Universal recognition by the international community is necessary for peace to succeed.

Finally, and most fundamentally, I urge all Episcopalians to pray regularly for all of the people of the Holy Land, for peace between the children of Abraham, and for a shared future that reflects the Psalmist's vision of Jerusalem as "a city at unity with itself," having peace within its walls and quiet in its citadels. (Psalm 122)

IV. A Closing Word

There is little doubt that the impasse of the present moment has brought frustrations in all quarters to new highs. For Palestinians, the challenges and burdens of life under occupation, and a shrinking footprint for a future Palestinian state, are untenable. For Israelis, the fear that changes in the region will lead to increased violence and hostility from all directions after a decade of relative harmony is equally untenable. For those of us who love both Israel and the Palestinian people, the frustration of continual advocacy for political solutions that don't come to fruition is disempowering and demoralizing. It is fair to say that we are not just at an impasse, but a real crisis.

The greatest risk in such moments of crisis is that frustration leads to further retrenchment, to further polarization masquerading as righteous anger, and to the creation of hearts of stone rather than hearts of flesh. The faith shared by the children of Abraham, however, demands a different response. It demands that we see that retrenchment itself, in all quarters, is precisely what has created the crisis of the present moment, the crisis of generation upon generation of conflict. If we are serious about the Scriptural vision of Jerusalem as the possession of God, standing as a signal to the nations of God's peace and justice, we must be the messengers who proclaim peace in the moments it seems most elusive. We must, as Bishop Dawani reminds us, grasp the hands of politicians and draw them to a meeting point midway, to compromises they may find uncomfortable or even previously unthinkable, to real and meaningful peace.

Some may ask why we should remain hopeful when each passing year feels like a further closing of the window for peace and each new fact on the ground seems to be a new impediment to peace rather than an incentive. Let us be reminded of what the engagement of millions of people of good will in this conflict has accomplished. The past decade alone has brought Palestinians economic and social infrastructure where it did not exist before, and effective governance in the West Bank that is demonstrably serious about peace and held in high regard by international partners. For Israelis, the past decade has brought security and safety that, while far from perfect, nevertheless is as firm as it has been at any point since 1948. These things would not have been possible without the engagement, advocacy, and friendship of millions of people around the world. It is precisely because these gains now seem at risk that frustrations run so high, but it is precisely the fact that these gains are at risk that should inspire us to continue.

People of faith are called to be people of hope, even when it seems darkest. Join me in hoping beyond hope for a fruitful resolution to this crisis. Let our motivation arise from Isaiah's vision of crying aloud to Jerusalem that her warfare truly is ended. I remain

Your servant in Christ,

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori Presiding Bishop and Primate

- [Español](#)

- |