"... pursuing justice and seeking peace are shortchanged." –William Sloane Coffin

Please ask the Steering Committee of the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice (ICPJ) to be faithful to its "core values" and to lift its restrictions on the Middle East Task Force (METF)

The Israel-Palestine conflict has long been a major international flashpoint. This festering sore has led to several wars between countries; brought the world to the brink of nuclear war; and, according to authorities as varied as Osama bin Laden and the authors of the 9/11 Commission Report, it is a major factor in international terrorism and global anger over the US government's overwhelming financial, military, and diplomatic support of Israel.

"Advocacy for the oppressed" is a purported core value of the ICPJ. With respect to the Israel-Palestine conflict the "oppressed" have spoken very clearly. On July 9, 2005, 171 Palestinian political parties, unions, associations, coalitions and organizations asked "people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era." At its August, 2005, meeting, by a 13-0 vote, the METF endorsed the Palestinian call. As part of the same motion, the METF voted to create an action plan to implement the call and voted to encourage the ICPJ's Steering Committee to also endorse the call. In response, ICPJ leaders refused to even put the matter to a vote of the Steering Committee and fomented a bitter dispute within the METF.

According to the Israeli human rights organization, B'Tselem, since the beginning of the second Intifada in 2000, Israelis have killed 3,512 Palestinians, including 695 children and Palestinians have killed 1,005 Israelis, including 119 children. Today, already high levels of chronic moderate and severe malnutrition among Palestinian children, aged five and younger, are skyrocketing as Israel, the EU, and the US collude to collectively punish Palestinians for voting for the 'wrong' people in their recent election.

According to Gideon Levy, writing in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz (Feb. 19, 2006): "The [Israeli government's] Hamas team … headed by the prime minister's advisor Dov Weissglas and including the Israel Defense Forces chief of staff, the director of the Shin Bet and senior generals and officials, convened for a discussion with Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni on ways to respond to the Hamas election victory. Everyone agreed on the need to impose an economic siege on the Palestinian Authority, and Weissglas, as usual, provided the punch line: 'It's like an appointment with a dietician. The Palestinians will get a lot thinner, but won't die,' the advisor joked, and the participants reportedly rolled with laughter."

As Levy notes, "While masses of Palestinians are living in inhumane conditions, with horrifying levels of unemployment and poverty that are unknown in Israel, humiliated and incarcerated under our responsibility and culpability, the top military and political brass share a hearty laugh a moment before deciding to impose an economic siege that will be even more brutal than the one until now."

Confronted with these realities, in May 2006, the Steering Committee "suspended" its own Middle East Task Force—the very group most interested in, and knowledgeable of, the Israel-Palestine conflict. In doing so, they invoked vague and unsubstantiated allegations and...

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A Jewish Holocaust Survivor Speaks Out
The phrase "Never Again"—the motto of Holocaust survivors—should be about protecting every person from ethnic cleansing and genocide. Unfortunately, the Arab Palestinians have not been afforded these protections. … I visited Palestine in 2003 and 2004 and saw with my own eyes the impact of the military occupation of Palestine, the cost in human lives and the suffering. Yes, Israeli Jews have suffered, too, but, by far, Palestinians have borne the brunt of a worthy dream—a safe place for Jews—which became a catastrophe or al-Naqba … for Palestinians. … It is time to end the catastrophe, and the killing and the suffering. … Now is the time for more drastic steps. I therefore support the call for "Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions against Israel Until It Complies with International Law and Universal Principles of Human Rights."

--From a July 31, 2005, letter by Hedy Epstein to the Veterans for Peace Board of Directors

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William Sloane Coffin on Israel & "Prophetic Fire"
What should churches be doing in the face of what's going on in [the United States] right now?
I think the bright flames of Christianity are now down to smoldering embers, if not ashes, of feeling comfortable. The church is pretty much down to therapy and management. There's really little prophetic fire. … And the poor rabbis have a problem being critical of Israel … If [American Jews] said to Bush, "We have to change," that would be it. But they're not saying it audibly, and not in concert, that's for sure.
The churches are a reflection of the truth of Plato's statement, "What's honored in the country will be cultivated there."…
… we have mediocre politicians, and the clergy is pretty mediocre also. But what's honored in a country will be cultivated there. The greatest recession in this country is not economic; it's spiritual. And so the great biblical mandates of pursuing justice and seeking peace are shortchanged.
rejected repeated pleas for dialogue. It is clear that this act of guilt-by-association and collective punishment was meant mainly to placate critics of the prophetic voice of Jewish Witnesses for Peace and Friends and other anti-Zionists within the METF.

In 1993, the Parliament of the World’s Religions issued its "Declaration Toward a Global Ethic." It affirmed, "that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the [world's] religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic." It declared, "No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever ... We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse. We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice, and peace."

Mainstream American Judaism is committed to supporting Israel—the Jewish state. For example, the Union for Reform Judaism has retreated from its historical commitment to non-nationalistic Judaism and now declares in its Constitution that being "supportive of the State of Israel" is one of its "four major goals." Ann Arbor's Conservative Rabbi, Robert Dobrusin, told his congregation in a sermon delivered on the most important day of the Jewish liturgical calendar that "the two most vital places of myth" in Judaism are "the State of Israel and the synagogue." He then described the "State of Israel" as "not only a haven … but a place of inspiration for all of us" and declared that "As Israel faces difficult times, it is essential that we rally behind her to insure her survival as a Jewish state."

Israel, however, is built upon past and ongoing domination, ethnic cleansing, and violence (facilitated by decisive American financial, diplomatic, and military support). There are 4.1 million UN-registered Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war alone; Israel will not let them return to their homes. The second-class citizenship of Palestinians and other non-Jews in Israel and the subjugation of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are fundamental to Jewish supremacy. Faithfulness and peace will not be achieved by sacrificing advocacy and justice for Palestinians on the altar of an unethical interfaith unity with Jewish or Christian supporters of Israel. On the contrary, interfaith unity in its truest and best sense is premised upon an ethic that demands justice.

As the Declaration advises, "Let no one be deceived: There is no survival for humanity without global peace! ... Let no one be deceived: There is no global peace without global justice!"

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Please ask the Steering Committee of the ICPJ:

- To remember the first principle of interfaith unity—adherence to an ethic that shuns violence and demands justice; and,
- To endorse Palestinian civil society's call for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions against Israel and to use ICPJ's resources to organize a vibrant campaign of divestment and broad boycotts on the streets and in our community's houses of worship and halls of power; and,
- To "develop a campaign ... to encourage the [US] government to end its complicity in ... violations of human rights by suspending its military aid and arms sales to Israel, and to divest ... from all companies that manufacture or sell arms and other military hardware to Israel" as pledged in the ICPJ's resolution of May 13, 2003; and,
- To lift its restrictions on the Middle East Task Force.

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Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel on the Prophet Jeremiah

The prophet knew that religion could distort what the Lord demanded … To the people, religion was Temple, priesthood, incense: "This is the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord" (Jer. 7:4). Such piety Jeremiah brands as fraud and illusion. "Behold you trust in deceptive words to no avail," he calls (Jer. 7:8). Worship preceded or followed by evil acts becomes an absurdity. The holy place is doomed when people indulge in unholy deeds. 

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