



General Board of **CHURCH & SOCIETY** of The United Methodist Church

Statement on “Freedom Flotilla” Incident

The General Board of Church & Society of The United Methodist Church condemns the deadly interception Monday by Israeli troops of the “Freedom Flotilla” trying to bring aid to the beleaguered people of Gaza.

The killing of nine humanitarian-aid workers and injuries to many more occurred in international waters as the six-boat convoy, sponsored by the Free Gaza Movement and a Turkish humanitarian relief organization, headed toward breaking Israel’s three-year blockade of Gaza. About 700 passengers from 35 countries were on the vessels attempting to deliver 10,000 tons of humanitarian supplies such as food and medicine to Gaza.

We grieve the loss of life and injuries sustained in what became a tragic confrontation between the forces of peace and those of armed aggression. We pray for the families of those who lost their lives. We are thankful, though, that Israeli authorities have begun to release the peace activists and humanitarian aid workers they detained.

The United Methodist Church has long advocated for a peaceful settlement of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians: a settlement that provides justice and security for both parties (“Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land,” 2008 UMC Book of Resolutions). The United Methodist Church believes negotiation and diplomacy will achieve this rather than through methods of violence and coercion (“Saying No to Violence in Middle East Conflict,” 2008 UMC Book of Resolutions). The need for this has been made patently clear by this morally reprehensible assault in international waters on peace activists and humanitarian aid workers.

Boarding the Freedom Flotilla in international waters is more than just an act of high-seas piracy. It is symptomatic of a broader, hopelessly flawed policy by Israel to subjugate the Palestinian people, allegedly to protect its own security. The United States has been complicit in this flawed policy.

We urge the Obama administration to take immediate steps to facilitate an international, independent investigation of this deadly interception of the Freedom Flotilla. Israel’s violent assault on the peace activists and humanitarian workers further destabilizes an already incendiary situation. This high-seas confrontation demonstrates the urgency of achieving a just peace before more innocents are slaughtered.

The United Methodist Church works with ecumenical and interfaith bodies to advocate for Palestinian self-determination and an end to Israeli occupation. Our General Conference has repeatedly affirmed Israel’s right to exist within secure borders. But this assault against civilians engaged in peaceful activities is an affront to any standard of decency. It will set back any attempts to achieve a peaceful two-state solution.

This tragedy could have been averted had Israel permitted the boats to arrive at Gaza and then searched them to ensure they contained humanitarian aid only. Such restraint would be a sign

of mature, thoughtful statesmanship, which has been consistently lacking on both sides in this 40-year-old drama of and oppression, destruction and death.

It is necessary for Israel to end the blockade of Gaza. The government of Israel should permit immediate delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. It is time to implement the two-state solution originally envisioned for the region.

We urge the United States government to take steps to bring Israel to the negotiating table to seek a fruitful, honest peace. We urge Israel to stop blockading Gaza, ending its oppression of 1.4 million Palestinian civilians, who deserve the right of liberty in pursuing a livelihood.

The violence must stop on both sides. The time for decisive action to impose a just, peaceful resolution has never been more evident than in this tragic assault on persons whose sole purpose was to achieve peace and bring aid to an oppressed populace.

—Jim Winkler, General Secretary
General Board of Church & Society
The United Methodist Church
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