



## **Backgrounder Presbyterian Church (USA) Middle East Study Committee Report**

*Overview:* The Jewish community is profoundly concerned about matters that will come before the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly in July 2010, including a one-sided and factually flawed Middle East Study Committee (MESC) report, a call to denounce an American company for its sales to Israel, and endorsement of the virulently anti-Israel Kairos Palestine document. These actions would extinguish the already flickering hope for positive Jewish-Presbyterian relations. A proposed document on Christian-Jewish relations could make a constructive contribution, but it would not make up for the damage to positive Jewish-Presbyterian relations that would be caused by the other proposed actions.

### **Middle East Study Committee report:**

- The MESC report is an egregious diatribe against Israel. It makes highly selective use of sacred texts, historical events, and current realities to build a narrative against the Jewish state.
- The MESC report's recommendations are extremely biased against Israel. There are more than a dozen demands placed on Israel and the United States for policies supporting Israel. The few recommendations for Palestinian reforms are generally paired with additional demands on Israel.

### **MESC Process Was Biased:**

- While the nine-person MESC was supposed to represent a diverse range of perspectives, most of the committee was squarely aligned with a pro-Palestinian or anti-Israel narrative. Most of the individuals with whom the MESC met have been critical of Israel.

### **MESC Report Is Insulting to the Mainstream Jewish Community**

- MESC outrageously admonishes the American Jewish mainstream community to “catch up” with American Jewish groups of which it approves, namely Jewish Voices for Peace, B’Tselem, and JStreet. The MESC met only briefly with one representative of a mainstream American Jewish organization. Had the MESC opened itself to a meaningful dialogue with the mainstream Jewish community, it might have learned that JVP is an anti-Israel group from far outside the mainstream – one that refuses to endorse a two-state solution and one that welcomes anti-Zionist Jews. B’Tselem isn’t even an American group. JStreet issued a statement that it was never consulted by the MESC, finds the MESC report troubling and unfair, strongly objects to the MESC findings, and is dismayed that the MESC used JStreet as “political cover” for the report.
- The MESC letter to the Jewish community dismisses as a semantic misunderstanding the deep Jewish concerns about the PCUSA path to divestment. Consultation with the Jewish community would have demonstrated the falsity of this mischaracterization.

### **MESC Presents a Problematic Theology:**

- The theological section of the MESC report flies in the face of much contemporary biblical scholarship and is a sword that is used only to cut against Israel.
- The report states that “the ‘land-grant’ to Abraham’s offspring described in Genesis is not so much a matter of ‘rights’ as it is a matter of ‘responsibilities.’” The MESC negates biblical claims the Jewish people might use to build a modern state in the land. But at the same time, the MESC lifts dozens of biblical verses to assign obligations to the modern state – biblical responsibilities we never see applied to other countries. There is something pernicious in this conflation of modern and biblical. If sacred texts cannot be used to justify this modern state alone, should they be used to condemn this modern state alone?
- Holding Israel to biblical standards permits use of words like “sinful” and “evil” to judge the actions of a modern state defending itself against modern threats. That is where criticism stops and demonization begins.

### **MESC Endorses Anti-Israel Screech:**

- Kairos is a virulently anti-Israel and anti-Jewish screech signed by sixteen Palestinian Christians. Kairos calls for boycott, divestment, and sanction of Israel. Under the pretense of hope and love, Kairos demonizes Israel. Kairos uses the word “evil” 29 times, as many times as the word “peace.” Kairos also uses arguably supersessionist language, such as calling a “dead letter” the “promises, the election, the people of God and the land” in the “Old Testament.”
- Kairos calls Palestinian terror “legal resistance.” Kairos dismisses any Palestinian culpability for the conflict, noting “if there were no occupation, there would be no ‘resistance.’” Kairos ignores the existential threats to Israel that preceded the 1967 war and that are still exemplified by the Hamas charter which calls for Israel’s destruction.
- The MESC report is a “Trojan horse” to endorse a pro-divestment document that should be explicitly rejected for its delegitimization of Israel, one-sided narrative, and supersessionism.
- The MESC defense that its endorsement of Kairos is based upon “its emphases on hope for liberation, nonviolence, love of enemy, and reconciliation” is frightening in its complete lack of criticism of Kairos’ many excesses.

### **MESC Punishes Caterpillar For Refusing to Violate U.S. Law:**

- The PCUSA singles out one company, Caterpillar, for selling to its dealers in Israel. The company has said that it is subject to strict anti-boycott requirements under American Law – and could face severe civil and criminal penalties for participating in an anti-Israel boycott. The PCUSA would punish a company for refusing to participate in a boycott that the company has been advised would be illegal.
- Perhaps, by denouncing a company, the PCUSA seeks to shield itself from the criticism it knows would be attendant to a call for divestment. The proposed action is still one-sided, unfair, and cannot be viewed as anything but support for the broader boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement.
- It is notable that the PCUSA has never investigated whether it is invested in companies responsible for violence against Israel, such as those operating in Iran or Syria. The only PCUSA engagement with a company responsible for harming Israelis was cursory, based on a five-year old Wall Street Journal article. The matter was dropped because the company, a bank, had already changed its procedures.

### **MESC Suggests Withholding Foreign Aid:**

- The MESC suggests withholding U.S. aid to Israel until Israel is “in compliance with international law and peacemaking efforts.” The PCUSA is hardly a fair arbiter of international law or peacemaking efforts. The MESC makes no analogous call to link Palestinian aid to Palestinian reforms. In discussing aid, the report uses the familiar, but offensive and transparent tactic, of referring to anti-Israel Jews where it quotes a Jewish critic of Israel who suggests redirecting aid to resettle Palestinian refugees in Israel.

### **MESC Avoids Support for Israel as a Jewish Homeland:**

- The report professes support for Israel as a “home” for the Jews. The word “homeland” is avoided. However, “homeland” is used six times referring to Palestinian and Christian attachment to the land. The one time the “homeland” is used referring to Jews, it is conditional.
- According to a footnote, PCUSA recognition of Israel is a “source of pain” for some on the MESC.

### **MESC Distorts Middle East History:**

- When discussing history, through scores of critical omissions, the MESC report glosses over anti-Israel aggression and war-mongering against Israel at present and throughout history. It ignores the oppression of the Jewish people by the Byzantine Christians. It describes Palestinian refugees from 1948, but fails to acknowledge Jewish refugees from Arab lands resulting from the same war. One author distorts history to describe “the 1948 invasion of Palestine by Israeli soldiers.” It ignores the events leading to the 1967 war, and overlooks any Palestinian challenges to Christian identity during centuries of Muslim rule.

### **MESC Blames Israel for Palestinian Terror against Israel:**

- The report blames Israel for the violence it endures. There is a complete failure to address pre-occupation Arab and Palestinian violence, rejectionism and aggression. “If there were no occupation, there would be no Palestinian resistance. If there was no Palestinian resistance, Israelis could live in peace and security.”

### **MESC blames Israel alone for Plight of Palestinian Christians:**

- The finger is solely pointed at Israeli “discrimination” and “occupation” for a decrease in the Christian population. Ironically, according to the report, itself, the Christian population has “remained steady, or may have even increased slightly.” It is the *percentage* of Christians that has dropped – in part because Christians have a lower birth rate.

***The PCUSA states that it views its role as one of reconciliation. Adoption of the MESC report would take the PCUSA irrevocably out of that role.***