

PUBLIC POLICY & SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE

Report on Recent Accomplishments and Activities

Prepared for USCJ Board of Directors, June 2010

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RECENT COMMITTEE ACTIONS

Sign on letters and making our movement visible in the Public Policy World:

The committee continues to vet requests for USCJ to sign on to letters dealing with Public Policy questions and to join social justice coalitions. Some examples of recent endorsements and letters we signed on to include:

- Signed on to a faith-based organizations letter in support of the repeal of the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” law, Military Readiness Enhancement Act of 2009 (H.R. 1283 & S. 3065).
- Lent our support to the proposed revised Workplace Religious Freedom Act
- USCJ joined other Jewish organizations in placing a full page ad which appeared in the April 30 edition of The New York Times, and urged America to end its reliance on foreign oil, thereby helping to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons and funding terror. The ad noted that “reduced energy dependence is absolutely vital to our national security, to Israel’s safety, and to the fight against terrorism.”

Response to Presbyterian Church USA’s Middle East Study Committee Report

The Middle East Study Committee of the Presbyterian Church USC (PCUSA) has come out with a report that is biased, flawed, unfairly represents Israel as the aggressor in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship and denies the historical connection between Jews and Israel. Our committee, in cooperation with other Jewish organizations, prepared and distributed information to educate our membership and clergy and assist them in grassroots efforts advocating for the PCUSA’s rejection of the MESC report at their upcoming General Assembly in July. Jack Fein and other representatives of Jewish organizations recently participated in a frank discussion with members of the Presbyterian Church at a meeting of the Christian Jewish Roundtable held in Washington, D.C. on this issue.

Religious Pluralism and the Proposed Conversion Law in Israel

We continue as part of a working group representing arms of the Conservative movement, in collaboration with groups from the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, to promote religious pluralism in Israel. Several of us met with Knesset Member David Rotem and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Danny Ayalon when they visited New York in early May, conveying our opposition to the bill which would alter the Law of Return by consolidating conversion power in the hands of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and harm the unity of the Jewish people by alienating many North American Jews.

Sustainability and the Environment

We continue our involvement in an interdenominational social action professionals working group which coordinates greening and environmental programs.

United Synagogue is part of a joint initiative with Women's League of Conservative Judaism and the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs to develop an environmental leadership campaign and encourage greening of our synagogues in partnership with GreenFaith, an interfaith coalition for the environment that works with houses of worship, religious schools and people of all faiths to help them become better environmental stewards.

Responding to the Threat from Iran

We continue to advocate for stronger sanctions to halt a nuclear Iran. USCJ, in partnership with the Israeli Consulate, continues to make available specially designed "No Nukes for Iran" banners available to our congregations at a special discounted price.

Jack Fein and Faye Gingold were among several USCJ representatives at a recent Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations where the threat from Iran was a prominent topic of discussion, along with the U.S.- Israel relationship and how the Jewish community can respond to growing efforts to delegitimize Israel.

Social Action – Helping Victims of the Earthquakes in Haiti and Chile

United Synagogue has a link on its website enabling people to donate money to aid victims of the earthquake in Haiti. To date we have collected over \$150,000 and have allocated funds to the American Jewish World Service and American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for their relief efforts. We are awaiting proposals from organizations so that we may evaluate them and allocate the remaining funds for Haiti relief. In addition, we directed people who wished to make donations to help the victims of the earthquake to Masorti Olami's Chile Earthquake Fund and recently received a note of thanks from them, noting our efforts in promoting their relief fund and raising awareness of their campaign, which raised over \$55,000 in donations.

REPRESENTING THE USCJ TO THE WIDER WORLD

United Nations NGO Representation

Dr. Jack Fein serves as United Synagogue's new United Nations NGO representative and Faye Gingold is the alternate. They replaced Phyllis Miller and Kalman Miller whose dedicated service for the past six years is greatly appreciated.

In conjunction with a group of informal Jewish NGO's and other Jewish organizations, Jack Fein and Faye Gingold attended a day-long seminar at Fordham Law School on the Goldstone Report, lawfare, the defamation of Israel and the threat to American national security in the age of terrorism.

Representation at the JCPA Plenum

Co-Chairs Rabbi Gordon and Dr. Fein attended the February 2010 Jewish Council for Public Affairs Plenum (JCPA) held in Dallas, Texas. Our committee continues to work closely with the JCPA on many public policy and social action issues.

Representation at IJCIC (International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations)

Our committee co-chairs and Rabbi Moshe Birnbaum, who is newly appointed to the committee, represent USCJ at IJCIC, the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, helping to extend our policy positions to interfaith forums.

Rabbi Gordon represented United Synagogue as a member of the IJCIC delegation at an international interfaith conference held in Rome in March. The mission to the Vatican was successful in helping build relationships and in making progress on clarifying the Vatican-world Jewish agenda.

Representation at the Interdenominational Social Action Professionals Working Group

Rabbi Gordon and Faye Gingold represent the USCJ, and along with Rabbi Jan Kaufman of the RA, represent the Conservative movement on this informal body that brings together Social Action professionals from the four main denominations of North American Judaism. Last year the group focused on environmental initiatives, including materials prepared by our movement for Blessing the Sun. Currently, one focus of the group is deepening the religious dimension of next year's JCPA plenum.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Committee Restructuring

We have updated our membership composition and work in close collaboration with the Israel Commission. We strive to improve intra-movement collaboration on matters of public policy and social action.

Maintaining a Truly International Focus

The committee will be working to build stronger ties to Canadian Conservative Jews as we consider issues and programs of significance to North America in general and the Canadian community in particular.