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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

*Preserving American Jewish History*

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series D: International Relations Activities. 1961-1992

Box 69, Folder 15, Palestinian human rights, 1979-1981.

STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE IN RESPONSE

TO PRO-PLO STATEMENT OF "SEARCH FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY" GROUP

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The American Jewish Committee condemns the so-called "Palestinian Human Rights Petition" issued by the pro-PLO group that calls itself "Search for Justice and ~~Peace~~ Equality in Palestine" as a gross and deliberate misrepresentation of fact and history and the latest installment of a carefully orchestrated campaign of vicious anti-Israel propaganda.

Rather than advancing the cause of genuine human rights, this "petition" can only have the unfortunate effect of strengthening the hands of those extremists who manipulate the language of human rights to further their true objective: the destruction of the State of Israel. Moreover, "the petition" is a disservice to the ~~cause~~ cause of true reconciliation. Not only does it ignore the signs of hope represented in the current Middle East peace process, the "petition" by its unrelenting hostility to Israel and its patent one-sidedness pollutes the moral climate in which a true, lasting, and just Middle East peace will ultimately be achieved.

Not only are its assertions concerning the actual history of the Middle East and "the law" careless or simply false, its "facts" and figures manufactured, and its sources either biased or misquoted, but the transparent intent of its language and allusions is to inflame. Following are several illustrations of the petition's myths versus realities:

The petition begins with reference to "the United Nations Partition Plan (November 29, 1947) which called for the creation of Israel and a Palestinian Arab State." It then asserts that the "UN resolutions and the very basic right of self-determination cannot be selectively applied." The clear implication is that either the UN, or the United States, or Israel "selectively" determined to deny the Palestinians the right to self-determination under the Partition Plan, when in actual fact Israel accepted



the UN plan and the Palestinians and allied Arab nations rejected the Partition Plan and launched a war of aggression against Israel. Having been the victimizers, they now seek to portray themselves as innocent victims.

The petition then calls for "negotiations between the chosen leadership of both parties," - Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs,- and then urged the American government to "faciliate talks between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel," and "to open such talks, its~~self~~ with the PLO."

The most effective response to that claim that the PLO is ostensibly "the chosen leadership" of the Palestinian people was given by President-elect Ronald Regan when he declared at a recent press conference:

"I think the PLO has proven that it is a terrorist organization. And I have said repeatedly I separate the PLO from the Palestinian refugees. No one ever elected the PLO." (underlining ours.)

On Sept. 4<sup>th</sup> 1980, President-elect Regan further declared:

"The PLO is said to represent the Palestinian refugees. It represents no one but the leaders who established it as a means of organizing aggression against Israel, and has murdered more Palestinians than it has Israelis. They are terrorists and should be identified as such. If others wish to deal with them, let it be on their heads. And let them be willing to pay the price of appeasement."

To the American Jewish Committee and undoubtedly to millions of other Americans, it is morally incomprehensible that Christian leaders would uncritically support a terrorist group with the blood of innocent civilian men and women, and children on its hands, whose Palestinian National Covenant binds its followers to the destruction of a sovereign nation-state, that is intimately allied with Soviet expansionism, and that has trained and supported militarily the Islamic Revolutionary Council in Iran that has kidnapped 50 American hostages in contravention of all international laws.

The "petition" then accuses Israel of violating human rights as specified in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva convention. By thus singling out Israel as the major villain on the Middle East and on the international scene, and by judging Israel alone by standards not applied elsewhere to Arab and other countries, the petition exemplifies the familiar pattern of PLO apologists to portray Israel as some kind of monster state, a pariah among the nations.

Here, too, the most effective response comes from non-Israeli and non-Jewish sources. In 1979, the United States State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices characterized Israel as "a full-fledged parliamentary democracy with extremely high standards of justice and human rights." In its 1978 study, Freedom House, the non-partisan institution that monitors the state of freedom around the world, identified Israel as the only "free" society in the Middle East.

More recently, the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA adopted a "Policy Statement on the Middle East" (Nov. 6, 1980) in which it declared:

"The National Council of Churches recognizes the need to apply similar standards of judgment to all countries of the Middle East in questions of human or minority rights, and to resist singling out only one country for particular focus without due recognition of other continuing human rights problems throughout the region."

Earlier, ~~xxxx~~ a special Middle East Panel of the National Council of Churches that investigated first-hand the conditions of human rights in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Israel, concluded :

"The Panel was impressed by the extent to which Israel has sought to provide as many rights as possible to a people under military occupation. Freedom of the press, with only rare exceptions, is evidenced in sharp



criticisms of many Begin government policies, criticisms that add to dissenting opinions and provide support for Palestinian causes. Freedom of speech results in fiery political rhetoric among Palestinian people in East Jerusalem and elsewhere even though it occurs in occupied territory. Acts of defiance are tolerated by the Israeli government, until understand-nervousness results in various forms of collective and and official harrassment of enemies of the States . Nevertheless, criticism of Israel is always more intense with regard to the denial of human and civil rights in Israel than in other countries of the Middle E<sub>st</sub>, PRECISELY BECAUSE OF ISRAEL'S CLAIM TO BE A DEMOCRATIC STATE.

"Further, the Panel strongly underscores the need to apply the same standards of judgment to all countries of the Middle E<sub>st</sub> in questions of human rights and to resist singling out any one country for particular focus."

The American Jewish Committee charges the pro-PLO organizers of this "petitions" with having consciously and maliciously ignored the violations of human rights of Christian, Kurds, Muslims, Bahais and Jews in Arab and Muslim countries in the Middle East and having singled out Israel as disclosing the true propagandistic motivation of this "petition." Fair-minded Americans will be far more accurately guided by the findings of the U.S. State Department, Freedom House, and the Middle East ~~Panel~~ Panel of the National Council of Churches than by this vicious politicized attack against Israel, "the only 'free ' society in the Middle East."

Finally, the same severe anti-Israel bias, and deliberate disregard for the truth is reflected in the "petition's" regarding "Israeli settlements in the West Bank" as constituting a "a major Israeli violation of the Universal Declaration and the Geneva Convention."

While there are respectable arguments for and against current Israel settlement ~~practices~~ policies, there is no substantial basis for the charges that these policies are "illegal." Illegality presupposes an occupying power which has displaced a legitimate sovereign. Jordan and Egypt, respectively did not enjoy that status on the West Bank and Gaza.

Dr. William V. O'Brien, professor of government at Georgetown University notes,

"...the West Bank was not and is not clearly the sovereign territory of Jordan, from whom Israel took it in a war of self-defense in 1967. The West Bank is an integral part of the Palestine Mandate within which a Jewish national home was to be created. In this sense the territory must be considered today to be unallocated territory."

The Camp David Accords of 1978 deliberately left open both the question of settlements and the ultimate status of the West Bank. For Israel to accept in advance of negotiations the principle that Israelis cannot settle on the West Bank, is to make unnecessary the negotiations still ahead.

This petition makes clear that Israel's enemies hope to gain through a carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign what they have been unable to achieve in repeated assaults on the battlefield: the weakening, and eventual undermining, of the Jewish State. The target of this smear campaign is the hearts and minds of American Christians, whose support for Israel is based on their conviction that Israel is a fellow democracy - imperfect as is any nation - but with a proven commitment to justice, liberty and human rights -- the only state in the Middle East with such a record, and one of the few in a world in which freedom is a swindling commodity.





Department of Historical  
and Doctrinal Studies

15 May 1979

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

Rev. Donald E. Wagner, Jr.  
The First Presbyterian Church  
1427 Chicago Avenue  
Evanston, IL 60201

Dear Don:

Thank you for your note and the conference materials. Having examined the program carefully and read Fr. Tarazi's paper several times I have come to the conclusion that the conference format and the spot assigned to me will not allow for any constructive contribution on my part. So it is with great reluctance that I find it necessary to cancel my appearance. I have wrestled with this at length since I am very loathe to break commitments. In fact, this represents the very first time in ten years of lecturing that I have taken such a step.

As I indicated in my earlier letter to you, I had hoped for some dialogue on the question of Palestinian rights. I agree the issue has not received sufficient attention and I do have reservations about Israeli policy towards inhabitants of the West Bank/Gaza and of Israel proper. But I also have criticism of Palestinian attitudes. I am afraid that any negative comments I might make regarding Israeli policy would be misconstrued in the virtually one hundred per cent pro-Palestinian make-up of the conference's speakers. I also do not find that serving as a respondent to Fr. Tarazi's paper would give me the opportunity to make my feelings known regarding the directions of the conference and the proposed call. I have some basic agreements with his paper regarding the false use of Scripture in deciding Middle East political questions. But I also have some fundamental theological



Department of Historical  
and Doctrinal Studies

-2-

objections. However, though I would be willing to debate Fr. Tarazi on theological grounds, I am afraid that this conference, given its goals and objectives, would not be terribly interested in that debate.

Perhaps one day soon it will be possible to organize a genuine dialogue among Christians on the Palestinian question. Such a dialogue is fairly lively even in Israel at the moment. I feel it is a crucial issue. In a letter to President Carter on the occasion of the Israeli-Egyptian peace accord I indicated my firm commitment to Israeli security needs but equally as firmly to genuine autonomy for the Palestinians. I am convinced that Israel cannot have real security until the Palestinian question is equitably resolved. And I understand Palestinian autonomy as something more than what has been publicly offered by the Begin government thus far, though I feel that a beginning could be made within the guidelines of the present plan.

A real Christian dialogue on the subject will require a mix of people far different from the group assembled at LaGrange. Certainly the speakers on your program would be candidates for such a dialogue. But a substantial number of other people would also be needed. And I still feel there has to be a place for an Israeli response. The program this weekend, as it has been set up, strikes me as a trial of Israeli policy without benefit of defense. This goes against something very deep within me both as a Christian and as an American who is committed to a legal system in which the accused must have their say for a fair trial.

Well, Don, I am said enough. I am truly sorry to disappoint you by withdrawing from the roster of speakers. But personal integrity has made that a must for me. While you may not agree with me, I hope you at least will appreciate my motivation.

Sincerely yours,

*John T. Pawlikowski*  
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Member, Advisory Committee, Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations  
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Jan. 8, '81

Dear Natalie,

Here 'tis. A bit of rewriting in the lead I didn't like, but so it goes. I first was going to skip it, thinking it mostly anti-Jewish clique, but noted some surprise names in list, like Cox, and gen desk thought we needed.

luv and a good '81

George



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US Clergymen Call for Reduced Aid to Israel<

By GEORGE W. CORNELL=

AP Religion writer=

NEW YORK (AP) - About 400 American clergymen, including several bishops and some celebrities, are calling for the United States to reduce its aid to Israel because of alleged violations of human rights.

In a statement released Tuesday, the clergymen also said the United States and Israel should each open talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The statement, whose signers included some previous critics of Israel, was to be delivered today to the Israeli embassy in Washington, and sent to President Carter, President-elect Reagan and other officials.

It charges Israel with violations of various principles of the United Nations declaration of human rights on the occupied West Bank and in Gaza, including torture, annexation of territory, property seizure and destruction, arbitrary arrests and collective punishment.

Israel has denied such charges in the past.

Noting that Congress in 1975 prohibited economic aid to any country engaging consistently in "gross violations" of human rights, the statement said:

"We ... call upon our government to reduce aid to Israel until she recognizes the human rights of the Palestinian people."

Signers of the statement included four United Methodist bishops, two of them retired, a retired Episcopal bishop, also Antiochian Orthodox Metropolitan Philip Saliba.

Also, Catholic anti-war activist, the Rev. Daniel Berrigan, his brother, ex-priest Phillip Berrigan, and civil rights leader the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who have previously criticized Israeli policies.

Other prominent signers included Harvard University theologian Harvey Cox; the Rev. J. Philip Wogaman, dean of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington; the Rev. William Wipfler, human rights official of the National Council of Churches and the Rev. Simon Smith, executive secretary of Jesuit Missions.

One Jew was among the signers: Rabbi Elmer Berger, leader of a former anti-Zionist Jewish organization.

The signatures were collected by "Search for Justice and Equality in Palestine," an organization which says it seeks human rights both for Palestinians and Israeli Jews.

"We urge the Israeli and American governments to recognize the right of Palestinians to self-determination, including an independent state in the west Bank and Gaza if they so decide," the statement says.

It says "mutual accommodation between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs can only result from negotiations between the chosen leadership of both parties" and called for negotiations between the United States and the PLO and also between Israel and the PLO.

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