

April 22, 2005

Dear Partners in Interfaith Dialogue,

The Jewish community remains committed to working in partnership with the mainline Protestant churches in our shared goal of a lasting peace in the Middle East that will allow both Israelis and Palestinians to fulfill their hopes and aspirations in security. We seek a balanced conversation in which those suffering on all sides are heard, a conversation that centers on assuring the religious, political and economic rights of Christians, Muslims and Jews.

The partnership between Presbyterian Church (USA) and the organized Jewish community was seriously strained by the divisive decision of the Presbyterian Church (USA) at its General Assembly to begin a process which includes the possibility of divestment from companies doing business in Israel. In the subsequent months, we have witnessed credible progress on the ground in the Middle East. The adherence to the path towards divestment by the General Assembly Council has disappointed us. The reliance upon opinions of the extreme fringe of the Jewish community to support these misguided efforts has confounded us. The resulting fracture in the relationship between the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Jewish community has distressed us.

The Jewish community is committed to engage in dialogue, even with those with whom we disagree - that is the very nature of dialogue. Yet, any Protestant denomination that would consider the weapon of economic sanctions to be unilaterally and prejudicially used against the State of Israel, or those who would hold the State of Israel to a standard different from any other sovereign state, creates an environment which makes constructive dialogue almost impossible. We value debate and in no way seek to suppress healthy discussion. Religious communities deserve the freedom, in their own unique ways, to consider how best to live out their calling as a community of faith. We, of course, seek the same right to speak out on issues which face our community. We will reach out to ministers and congregants, to religious and civic leaders, in our effort to focus us on peace rather than internecine conflict. Our goal is to mobilize Christians and Jews as allies for peace, not partisans who would discriminate against Israel.

At this fragile time in Middle East peace negotiations, all who seek peace should be focused on continued economic and political engagement, and what can be done to support efforts for peace and confidence building. We call on our Christian colleagues to reject all negative economic and political sanctions, for they undermine peace, foster prejudice and give hope to extremists on every side.

Rabbi Gary Bretton-Granatoor, Anti-Defamation League
Betty Ehrenberg, Orthodox Union
Dr. David Elcott, American Jewish Committee
Ethan Felson, Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Rabbi Eugene Korn, American Jewish Congress
Mark Pelavin, Union for Reform Judaism
Mark Waldman, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism