

Combating BDS

Witnessing the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly last month left us feeling both frightened and hopeful. We saw firsthand visceral hate. We heard dogmatic voices within the PCUSA who sought to punish Israel by calling for divestment and demonize Israel through one-sided reports filled with half-truths and some flat-out lies.

But what we found most troubling was a very organized group calling for divestment: Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). Almost 200 showed up in black T-shirts that read "Another Jew Supports Divestment" and scarves made to look like tallit. The JVP has made BDS presentations at so many churches that many of the delegates truly believe that they represent the greater Jewish community.

What gave us hope was witnessing the church members of Presbyterians for Middle East Peace (PFMEP) working diligently to lobby the assembly's commissioners to stop divestment efforts. We met fearless Presbyterians, such as Frank Allen of the Central Florida Presbytery who told delegates, "Divestment will not end the conflict and bring peace. Divestment will create dissension. Dialogue and relationship building will lay the groundwork for true peace."

Our Jewish organizations, the AJC, ADL, the Jewish Federation of

Metropolitan Detroit and its NEXTGen division, the JCRC and URJ, presented a united front of Jews who stood up for Israel, cared about Palestinians and expressed a sincere desire to create a sustainable peace.

Yet, even with wonderful partners and the best of intentions, divestment passed.

The vote to divest has opened the door to anti-Semitism here and has already sparked further divestment in Europe, where anti-Semitism is reaching a boiling point.

Simone Rodan-Benzaquen's article in the *Wall Street Journal* "Do Jews have a future in Europe?" documents the rise of far-right anti-Semitic parties, murder and shootings aimed at Jews. The European Union's Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) called the Jewish ritual of circumcision a human rights violation – equating it to ritual female mutilation of girls.

Here in the U.S. at Harvard, Florida Atlantic, Rutgers, UCLA Berkley and University of Michigan, Jewish students received fake eviction notices. The



Brenda Rosenberg and Ariana Mentzel



Rev. Amy Morgan, Sherri Schiff, Brenda Rosenberg and Ariana Menzel

eviction notices were not authentic nor official, but a very organized campaign to spread lies and put fear in the hearts of all Jews. The danger of fear is that it creates a rift. The first response to fear is to fight or flee from it.

Our Response

We see our Tectonic Leadership model as an alternative that can transform the rift. Our model directly addresses tension. What if we can use the tension as an opportunity to connect with like-minded part-

ners, not just within the Presbyterian Church, but all people of good faith?

What if we could help build powerful partnerships to lead and work together on Israel-Palestine peace issues?

We can't eradicate the hate-filled detractors with myopic vision. They are a dangerous force dividing Jews and Christians. The best way to marginalize those voices within the PCUSA, Jewish Voices for Peace and the BDS movement is to build a bridge and find new solutions for creating a sustainable

peace together.

We need to identify and partner with leaders both religious and political who are willing to speak up and show zero tolerance for hate speech.

We need to jointly address anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism and persecution of Christians with different tools for different groups. (i.e. identify and empower moderate Muslims to confront extremists in their communities).

We need early education, continuing education and de-radicalization programs.

We are meeting with young leaders and friends in the ministries. With the women of WISDOM (Women's Interfaith Solutions for Dialogue and Outreach in Metro Detroit), we are working on a program to address the challenging issues we face. We have asked to form and be part of a coalition of our Jewish organizations.

We cannot undo the harm that has been done, but by working together we can create a new future. □

Brenda Rosenberg is co-founder of the Tectonic Leadership Center for Conflict Transformation and Cross Cultural Communication. Ariana Mentzel is an intern with the organization, which can be found at www.tectonicleadership.org.

A Call to Action

Imagine this nightmare scenario: Israel is suddenly under massive attack and unable to properly defend itself. The situation quickly becomes dire as a full-scale calamity looms and the world sits idly by, watching and expecting the imminent collapse of the Jewish state.

What do you do? Pray? Hope? Cry? All of the above?

American Jews would certainly come together, as we always do in a time of crisis. This was evident once again after the recent kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teenagers. We held memorial services, recited Kaddish, poetry and sang Hatikvah, all beautiful and respectful responses to the tragic event. It helped heal our pain and signaled Jewish determination and solidarity. But that's, sadly, not nearly enough of what's needed now.

The reality is that Israel needs real action from American Jews, way beyond words and songs, and it needs it immediately.

Arab rockets incessantly attack Israel, and the threats to its existence grow deeper and more serious. We decry the world's indifference or hostility, but what does our outrage get us? What do our tears accomplish? It's obviously not making anything better.

There are many actionable steps American Jews can take, whether it's through supporting AIPAC, our pro-Israel lobby, with money (go to www.aipac.org), supporting the election and re-election of pro-Israel lawmakers, educating yourself and others about the dangerous Boycott-Divestment-



Mark Jacobs

Sanctions movement (see www.stopbds.com), writing your congressman about pro-Israel issues, writing the White House (www.whitehouse.gov) or other affirmative actions.

But we, each of us, need to do something other than stand on the sidelines and root for the IDF or attend a memorial service. Israel needs way more than long-distance cheerleaders, no matter how heartfelt our wishes may be.

Sorry, nice gesture, but that alone doesn't cut it, not at this critical juncture.

We all say nice things about Israel, and I'm sure the Israelis appreciate it. But excuse them for not being overwhelmed by our kind words as they flee incoming Arab rockets, hear

the screams of the sirens, sprint to a bomb shelter or try to comfort their terrorized children.

We American Jews have the luxury of theorizing about war in the Middle East, but if you're living under regular rocket attack, hasn't the war already begun? Hasn't that major crisis already arrived? Wouldn't we in the U.S. deem it so if it were happening here?

Israel's crisis is our crisis. Those teenage boys are our boys. Please, for the sake of them and all of us, get into the game, if you're not already. Doing nothing besides lending moral support is no longer an option.

Take real action. Now. Before a real nightmare unfolds. Our words, songs and tears are great. But there's a time to cry and a time to act, and if we don't do more of the latter right now, we might one day do more of the former. □

Mark Jacobs of Farmington Hills works with AIPAC and Jewish Family Service.