

## **United Methodist Women respond to the Crisis in Gaza An Urgent Call to Action from January 1 – January 6, 2009**

In the wake of Israeli bombing of Gaza, including the death of innocent civilians and to the Israeli blockade of Gaza, United Methodist Women are urged to take action for peace in the first week of January.

### **The situation in Gaza:**

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Israel bombed Gaza and completely shut off all humanitarian shipments for weeks. Since then only small amounts of humanitarian aid have been able to get into Gaza. Half of the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza are children, who lack clean water, medicines, fuel and adequate food as a result of the blockade. Hamas responded by re-initiating rocket-fire into Israeli communities.

On December 26, Israel launched waves of air strikes on Gaza, destroying Hamas security facilities and numerous other buildings. In the first four days over 375 were killed and over 600 wounded. As of New Year's Eve, after 5 days of air strikes, Israel rejected a cease fire plan. Israel stated on Dec. 26 that this was "the start of what could be days or even months" of an assault that could include ground forces (New York Times, Dec. 27, 2008). Egypt initially sealed off southern border as Gazans attempted to flee. Since then it has allowed the wounded to cross to gain medical attention in Egypt, and allowed some food and medical shipments in.

Said the New York Times, the assault "began in broad daylight as police cadets were graduating, women were shopping at the outdoor market, and children were emerging from school." (12/27/08)

UN General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto noted on 27 December that Israel's actions violate international law in that they inflict collective punishment -- 1.5 million Gazans are being punished for the actions of a few militants; they target civilians; and they are a disproportionate military response. The international community shares complicity in this collective punishment, as it has tacitly accepted the Israeli blockade of Gaza, with devastating impact on the population, half of whom are children.

Israel attacks on the occupied Gaza Strip are with U.S. weapons in violation of U.S. law. Israel's war and siege on the Gaza Strip would not be possible without the jets, helicopters, ships, missiles, and fuel provided by the United States. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has threatened that this is merely "the first stage."

The Israeli assault was condemned by the European Union, the United Nations, Russia and Egypt. The Bush Administration has blamed Hamas for the violence.

### **United Methodist Women Respond:**

On December 31, 2008, Harriett Olson, Deputy General Secretary of the Women's Division, sent a letter to Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and Senator Hillary Clinton, asking that the US urge Israeli to immediately end the attack on Gaza and allow humanitarian aid to enter the region.

Ms. Olson's letter builds on United Methodist Women's and United Methodist policy. In the context of the current crisis, UMW states the following:

We are appalled at the on-going humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the recent bombings and rocket fire. Violence from both sides of the wall undermines the prospects for peace.

There must be a committed, sustained process toward peace that takes into account the human rights of all persons in this conflicted region, including Gaza and the West Bank.

As stated in a 2007 Women's Division recommendation, "ending military occupation is a necessary precondition for a just and lasting peace. Occupation is illegal under international law and must be ended...The US government rightly condemns Palestinian attacks on civilians; however, the US continues to provide financial, military and political support for Israeli attacks on civilians. It is such imbalance that the United Methodist Church, seeks to end." [The World Says No to Israeli Occupation, April 2007]

We affirm the call by United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon who has "appealed for an immediate halt to the renewed violence in the Middle East" (December 2008).

We call for humanitarian supplies to be allowed into Gaza to aid the distressed population of 1.5 million Palestinians, who have been suffering due to shortages of food, medicine and fuel.

United Methodist Women urge this Administration and the incoming Obama Administration to demand that Israel immediately cease the attack on Gaza and end the blockade of Gaza, allowing life-saving supplies to a beleaguered population. While the levels of violence are in no way commensurate, Hamas must also cease shelling Israeli communities. The US should withhold all military support to Israel, which is currently being used in the attack on innocent civilians against US law.

### **What United Methodist Women Can Do in this Time of Crisis:**

1. Pray for US leaders and all leaders in the Middle East who might find the ways that make for peace. Pray for all families who are bereaved by this recent violence or who have loved ones who are injured or who are suffering from lack of medical supplies, clean water and electricity. Organize active group prayer times, both public and private, between the New Year and Epiphany on January 6, 2009. This can include vigils to read prayers in front of Israeli embassies or consulates if there is one located in your community. During prayers for the community on Sunday morning, lift up prayers on behalf those dying in Gaza and in conflicts around the world.

2. Make calls for peace public. Thousands of people have already taken to the streets in New York, Washington, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dearborn, MI and dozens of other cities to protest Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip. There have been vigils and protests in more than 100 places in 30 states. To find out where there are vigils in your area, go to [www.endtheoccupation.org](http://www.endtheoccupation.org).

3. Contact elected representatives and set up emergency meetings with your Members of Congress before January 6. Demand from the President, your Representative, and

Senators an unconditional, immediate cease-fire; full humanitarian access to Gaza and a lifting of Israel's siege; and accountability for Israel's misuse of U.S. weapons to kill Palestinian civilians. Assemble a delegation of concerned constituents and request an immediate meeting with them. In these meetings, ask your Members of Congress to send a public letter to Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and make a public statement with the demands above. For talking points and information on how to set up an appointment, see [www.endtheoccupation.org](http://www.endtheoccupation.org). For letter ideas from Church Women United, go to [www.churchwomen.org](http://www.churchwomen.org).

4. Get the message out to the media and friends.

--Call in to local radio shows

--write letters to editor

--raise concerns in conversation with family, church and work colleagues, to bring more balance to reports in US media

--Join to end the Israeli occupation through the United Methodist Women group on Facebook to share concerns and action strategies:

[www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=36880545136&ref=ts](http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=36880545136&ref=ts)

--Make a Prayer for Peace on the United Methodist Women Online Community:

[www.umwonline.org](http://www.umwonline.org)

5. Call the United Nations to support the Secretary General's call for an immediate end to hostilities and access to humanitarian aid, and to support Miguel D'Escoto's call for Israel to respect international law. Call on work days between Jan. 1 and Jan. 6.

6. Call Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and Senator Hillary Clinton citing that they have received a letter from United Methodist Women and affirming our call for an end to Israeli attacks, access to humanitarian aid, and an end to the blockade.

As you respond, please let the offices of Community Action and Global Justice know of your actions. Contact Sophony Lamour at 212-682-3633, or [slamour@gbgm-umc.org](mailto:slamour@gbgm-umc.org) to share information. When possible, send pictures, video clips or brief summaries of your actions so we can share with others.

### **A History of Action for Middle East Peace by United Methodist Women and the United Methodist Church:**

As women organized for mission through the United Methodist Church, we respond to the needs of women, children and youth around the world. United Methodist Women's Mission Giving supports programs for children and youth in the Occupied Territories.

United Methodist Women and the United Methodist Church have actively advocated for peace in the Middle East in the context of human rights and international law. The United Methodist Church "advocate(s) for Palestinian self-determination and an end to Israeli Occupation;" and affirms "Israel's right to exist within secure borders; ...the right of return for Palestinian refugees under international law; ...(and) region-wide disarmament." The church "urge(s) Israelis and Palestinians to stop human rights violations an attacks on civilians," and urges "the U.S. government to initiate an arms embargo on the entire Middle East region." [United Methodist Book of Resolutions 2004, # Resolution 312, Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land]

In April 2007, the Women's Division urged United Methodist Women to become actively engaged in action for peace in the Middle East. This includes the demand "that the United States end its uncritical use of military, economic, diplomatic and corporate power to support Israeli occupation of Palestinian West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, and Syrian Golan Heights." [Steps Toward a Just Peace in the Middle East, Women's Division, April 2007]

In that recommendation the Women's Division affirmed that "the best way to promote security and stability in the region is to support democratic change, decent jobs and futures shaped by the people. These should affirm United Methodists' commitment to human rights, international law and the involvement of the United Nations in the region."

In 2006-2008, thousands of United Methodist Women studied the history and current context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and took action by visiting the region on study trips; sending postcards to Congress, speaking out against military occupation and calling for human rights for all in Palestine/Israel. The President of the Women's Division/United Methodist Women addressed a rally in Washington DC calling for an end to the Israeli occupation on the 40<sup>th</sup> year of Israeli military occupation. As members of Churches for Middle East Peace and the Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, United Methodist Women play a leadership role in seeking peace in the region by addressing US policy.