

RESOLUTION  
ON THE  
MIDDLE EAST

A Resolution Developed by the  
Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy

Adopted By the 209th General Assembly (1997)  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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# ❖ Foreword

IN THE EXERCISE of its responsibility to witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every dimension of life, the 209th General Assembly (1997) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has adopted the *Resolution on the Middle East*. It is presented for the guidance and edification of the whole Christian church and the society to which it ministers.

The resolution will determine procedures and programs for the ministry divisions of the General Assembly Council and staff of the General Assembly. It is recommended for consideration and study by other governing bodies (sessions, presbyteries, and synods). It is commended to the free Christian conscience of all congregations and the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for prayerful study, dialogue, and action.

Ever since the General Assembly adopted the *Resolution on the Middle East*, numerous requests for the church's policy in this key area have been received. In addition, the mandate of the General Assembly Council to fulfill programmatic interpretation responsibilities has led to this user-friendly resource publication.

The *Resolution on the Middle East* presented in these pages maintains the precise wording of the General Assembly's action recorded in the official *Minutes*, yet offers it in a more readable format. All of the material has been included. However, editorial liberty has been taken in terms of rearranging the material so that it is easier for the reader to follow. The *Minutes* of the General Assembly cluster all policy and recommendations for commissioners to take action on at the beginning of the resolution. This is followed by a "background" section. This ordering has been adjusted to allow for separate chapters, opening with a background

description, followed by the "Recommendation" section in bold print. Bold print signifies the actual adopted policy and recommendations of the 209th General Assembly (1997). We encourage you to undertake a careful reading of the policy and recommendations as well as the background material included in this resolution. Located on the inside back cover is a list of offices of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) involved in issues related to the Middle East.

It is hoped that this publication, similar to the recent *Resolution on the United States and Its Asia-Pacific Relations*, adopted by the 206th General Assembly (1994), will further the challenging experience of study, discussion, and connection in mission with partner churches in the Middle East and Southern Asia and with all the peoples of this region.

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THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) was requested to submit a report to the 209th General Assembly (1997) that would review "issues related to the larger Middle East area with recommendations for appropriate public policies and church involvement" (Minutes, 1996, Part I, p. 388, paragraph 34.118). This resolution seeks to address the request of the 208th General Assembly (1996). It reports on political, economic, human rights, environmental, and military concerns that continue to impact the Middle East peace process. It also commends efforts made by the United States government over the last twelve months in the Middle East, and calls upon the United States to continue to be active in the Middle East peace process. This resolution also highlights ways the people of the United States and the international community can adopt practices and policies that can have an impact on the Middle East. It calls on all Middle East parties to work together to prevent violence and to seek nonviolent resolutions to conflict.

**PAINFULLY AWARE** that the conflicts in the Middle East have exacted a terrible toll in human suffering and exacerbated international and interreligious tensions for more than half a century, and taking account of both the accomplishments so far and the challenges ahead, the 209th General Assembly (1997) believe that the peace process started in Madrid and cosponsored by the United States still holds the promise of achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace, and that the United States needs to continue to play an active role of mediating peace and, in some instances, to take initiatives for reconciliation and restoration of relationships with countries with whom there continue to be barriers of hostility and alienation.

Therefore, the 209th General Assembly (1997) urge Presbyterians (individual members, sessions, presbyteries, synods) to

- (1) continue to study the issues, and pray for what makes for a lasting peace in the region;
- (2) work on building support for these recommendations within their communities, with other Presbyterians, with members of local congregations of other Christian communions, and with local and regional ecumenical agencies;
- (3) approach Jewish and Muslim leaders in their communities to develop interreligious dialogue and public cooperation for peace in the Middle East;

- (4) utilize the study materials available from the Office on Interfaith Relations (Worldwide Ministries Division), Washington Office (National Ministries Division), Presbyterian Peacemaking Program (Congregational Ministries Division), and those produced by the U.S. Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the issues and challenges of the region.

and

- (1) directs the Stated Clerk to distribute the Resolution on the Middle East, including background, to President Clinton, Vice-President Gore, the secretary of state, the ambassador to the United Nations, and all members of Congress;
- (2) directs the Worldwide Ministries Division to develop and distribute a guide for making appropriate contacts with partner churches and Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) mission personnel when traveling in the Middle East.

# I CONCERNING

## ARAB-ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS



THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) has expressed consistent concern for peace between Israel, the Palestinian people, and the Arab states, and for U.S. policies to encourage and help bring to fruition negotiations for comprehensive, just, and lasting peace (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1969, Part I, p. 595; *Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1974, Part I, p. 584; *Minutes*, PCUS, 1976, Part I, p. 218; *Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1977, Part I, pp. 430, 484; *Minutes*, 1984, Part I, p. 338; *Minutes*, 1986, Part I, p. 877; *Minutes*, 1988, Part I, p. 365; *Minutes*, 1990, Part I, pp. 105, 106; *Minutes*, 1995, Part I, pp. 688, 718).

Our concerns and positions are informed by 160 years of Presbyterian involvement in the Middle East, by the situation and perspectives of Middle Eastern Christians, including series of the Middle East Council of Churches and, more recently, urgent concerns about Jerusalem expressed by the leaders of the Christian churches in Jerusalem.

Our concerns and positions in relation to peace in the Middle East are also informed by and sensitive to concerns for Christian-Jewish and Christian-Muslim relations. (See *Minutes*, 1988, Part I, pp. 365-66; *Minutes*, 1989, Part I, p. 585; *Minutes*, 1990, Part I, p. 104.)

Members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) work for the Middle East locally, nationally, and internationally in a variety of ways, including in cooperation with members of other Christian communions; ecumenical agencies, such as Churches for Middle East Peace, the National Council of Churches, and World Council of Churches; and in a variety of inter-religious efforts, including the U.S. Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East.

The Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process—started at Madrid in October 1991, and cosponsored by the United States and the (then) Soviet Union—has made significant progress, especially when measured against the bitterness and apparent intractability of the conflict over several decades. However, the promise of comprehensive and lasting peace remains unfulfilled. During 1996, several developments converged to create a serious crisis in the peace process.

#### THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

As Christians, we hunger for righteousness (Matt.5:6). We believe hungering for righteousness includes striving for ethical behavior, equal treatment for all, and compassion for the less powerful.

As Christians, we are called to be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9). We believe that the peace we seek includes an end to war, fair and equitable resolution of human conflict, and living with others in the spirit of generous love of neighbor.

As Christians, we are called to participate in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–19).

We believe our work for righteousness, peace, and reconciliation is a response to and reflection of what God already has accomplished for all creation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This means that the ministry of reconciliation we are given does not begin with us, but involves our commitment to a process of discovering how reconciliation already is being accomplished by God through others and finding ways to participate in this work.

We seek to do this work of reconciliation in a spirit of humility and responsibility.

As children of Abraham, we acknowledge with appreciation and respect the rich spiritual resources and core ethical teachings in Judaism and Islam that call Jews and Muslims to work for righteousness, peace, and reconciliation. We believe it is imperative, especially in working for peace in the Middle East, that we seek to learn from one another and find common ground to work together. (See “Guidelines, #d” set forth by

representatives of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Middle East Council of Churches meeting in Cyprus, November 9–11, 1988, *Minutes*, 1989, Part I, p. 390.)

#### HISTORICAL AND PRACTICAL CONCERNS

We acknowledge that whenever we speak we do so out of our particular history and context. When addressing the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we must take responsibility for historical and contemporary realities that bear heavily on our relationship with the peoples of the Middle East.

We acknowledge and confess the history of Christian prejudice and the persecution of Jews, including Western Christian responsibility in relation to the Holocaust. Even as we work for peace in the Middle East, which at times will involve being critical of particular Israeli policies, we need to be sensitive to how this history may affect our perceptions of the situation or the perceptions Jews may have of us. We need to learn more about the different viewpoints among Jews about Israel and the peace process, seek common ground in working for peace, and be determined to challenge anti-Jewish prejudice in the strongest terms. (See General Assembly resolutions on “Christian-Jewish Relations,” *Minutes*, 1987, Part I, pp. 416–22 and *Minutes*, 1989, Part I, pp. 388–91; and on “Anti-Semitism,” *Minutes*, 1990, Part I, p. 839.)

We acknowledge and confess the history of Christian ignorance, prejudice, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that inspired the Crusades and, in modern times, fueled Western Christian complicity in colonialism. In the Middle East, both Arab Muslims and other Arabs have suffered terribly from this history and, still today, struggle with how to relate to Western influences, including the role of the United States and its strong support for Israel. In light of the powerful influence of the religious renewal taking place among Muslim communities in the Middle East and across the world, as well as the growing American Muslim community, we need to learn much more about Islam and Muslims. In our work for peace in the Middle East, we need to be sensitive to Arab-American Christian and American Muslim perceptions, to challenge widespread negative stereotypes, and to seek ways to work together, as we also seek ways to work together with American Jews. (See General Assembly Resolution on “Christian-Muslim Relations,” *Minutes*, 1987, Part I, p. 494.)

We acknowledge that we speak and act as Americans who live a safe distance from the bitter, painful realities of the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and from the fears and frustrations about the peace process. We are committed to listening to the voices of people directly involved on the ground, and to providing encouragement and support to people on all sides of the conflict who are striving toward peace.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

- ❖ In the years since the 1991 Madrid conference, there have been several significant accomplishments of the peace process. Especially at times of crisis in the peace process, it is important to keep these accomplishments in mind.
- ❖ Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (September 1993)—based on mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).
- ❖ Donor countries pledge \$2 billion in aid to Gaza and the West Bank (September 1993).
- ❖ Agreement on the Gaza Strip and Jericho (May 1994)—Arafat returns to Palestine.
- ❖ Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty (October 1994).
- ❖ First Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit in Morocco (October 1994).
- ❖ Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement (September 1995)—provides for Israeli military withdrawal from parts of the West Bank and Gaza, and Palestinian elections for Self-Governing Authority.
- ❖ Second Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit in Jordan (October 1995).

- ❖ Israel and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon reached understandings about what would be required, including security arrangements necessary, to conclude peace agreements (1995).
- ❖ At the regional level, the Arab boycott of Israel effectively ended. Israel and several Arab countries, including Morocco, Tunisia, Oman, and Qatar, took steps toward establishing normal diplomatic relations (1994–95).
- ❖ Third Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit in Egypt (November 1996).
- ❖ Multilateral Working Groups on Arms Control and Regional Security, Environment, Economic Development, Refugee, and Water Resource met several times and identified problems to address and concrete projects to pursue.

During late 1995 and 1996, several developments occurred that created a serious crisis in the peace process, including the following: the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist; suicide bombings by Palestinian extremist that killed 160 Israelis; Israeli military closure of Palestinian self-governing areas; attacks by Hezbollah on Israeli forces in Southern Lebanon and Israeli retaliatory raids, including an artillery attack on a refugee camp killing three hundred persons; and the election in Israel of a government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, whose Likud Coalition advocates increased support for expansion of settlements and continued Israeli control over West Bank and Gaza. In late 1996, the new Israeli government's insistence on changes in the agreement for military withdrawal from Hebron stalled negotiations for months, causing tensions to increase. A violent clash erupted when Israel opened a second entrance on the Via Dolorosa to a tunnel that had been excavated under a section of the old city.

The crisis in the peace process reflects fears and frustrations of Palestinians and Israelis. For Israelis—who expected the peace process to provide greater security, especially after the suicide bombings last spring—there is persistent fear of new terrorist attacks. For Palestinians—who expected the peace process to provide gradual

improvement in their daily lives—there are terrible hardships caused by the very slow pace of economic development aid and Israeli military closures of Palestinian self-governing areas, combined with the threats posed by new Israeli government decisions supporting further confiscation of land and expansion of settlements.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) Reaffirm the actions of the 208th General Assembly (1996) concerning the peace process.
- (2) Commend the United States government on its active role in implementing a negotiated agreement on Hebron, and urge the U.S. government to continue a proactive role in moving the peace process forward, giving particular attention to Israeli security concerns, the status of Palestinian refugees and political prisoners, and the call for a just resolution of the final status of Jerusalem.
- (3) Call upon the United States to take effective measures, including withholding aid and joining in efforts of the United Nations Security Council, to oppose expansion of Israeli settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, and in the Jerusalem area, where unilateral action, without negotiations, exacerbates national and religious tensions, and runs the risk of generating violent confrontation.

## II CONCERNING THE STATUS OF DEMOCRACY AND RELIGION



THE TERM “MIDDLE EAST” is a designation of a region given by westerners, reflecting a presupposition that global realities can be oriented around the West’s assumed centrality. It is in relation to the West that this area is “Middle” and “East” (to be contrasted with another area that is “Far” and “East”). Indeed, this perspective influences the concern in the West regarding the presence or absence of democracy in the region, and the forces working for or against democratization. “Democratization” is interpreted both in the West and elsewhere as a process that leads to conformity with what are already Western standards. This has either positive or negative connotations depending on one’s perspective. In the West, there is a frequent assumption that Western values and systems should be adopted elsewhere—characterized by such terms as pluralism, liberalism, secularism, equal justice under law, free elections, human rights, political participation, governmental accountability, and separation of powers. The values represented by these terms have not necessarily found ready acceptance in the Middle East, with its own traditions and customs.

Indeed, any search for principles that would enable the equality of all persons in a society is complicated in the Middle East by the cultural and legal significance of group identity in many countries. Commonly, an individual’s identity is tied to a particular community identity, this generally being at least partially religious by definition. Religion interfaces with every aspect of life. Religion provides fundamental identity and values.

This region is the cradle of monotheistic religions that have become major forces around the globe. The three historic religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are each rooted, in their own way, in



God's relationship with Abraham and his offspring. Yet each claims a faith that is exclusive in allegiance and that makes demands which apply to members of the community anywhere in the world. Today, as in the past, people of these faiths live in the region. Muslims are a majority in most of the area, in some countries making up almost all the population. But there are between thirteen and fifteen million Christians present, and Jews are the overriding majority in Israel, where Jews have full rights of entry.

A dominant theme in the contemporary Middle East is the conflict between traditionalist religious forces and emerging modern society. This is most visible in the confrontation between so-called Islamists and those labeled as secularists. Most of the latter category are religious people who seek new ways of interpreting their faith in light of modern life. This group often expects to follow new ways for dealing with the plurality of religious traditions in a society. In contrast, Islamists focus on asserting distinctly Muslim values, frequently seeking some form of adherence to Islamic law (*shari`a*) based on the *Qur'an*. Islamists in the Middle East recognize the majority status of Muslims in the various countries. They desire a return to distinctly Islamic standards because they understand modern secular life has brought them the worst elements of Westernization—materialism, consumerism, the breakdown of community values, hedonism. Islamists expect to accommodate non-Muslim minorities (including Christians) within their societies through preserving traditional means for these groups to follow their own standards in matters relating to birth and death, family and inheritance, religious beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, minorities in various ways are asked by Islamists to conform to the general societal standards set by the Islamic majority.

Islam in the Middle East is far from a monolithic force. It has internal divisions. Additionally, certain groups of Islamic origin or containing strong Islamic elements stand at the margins or completely outside of normative Islam. The Druze of the Levant are not considered to be within the main tradition of Islam; the Baha'is, growing out of an Islamic context, are viewed by Muslims as totally outside of any acceptable bounds of Muslim diversity. This consequently subjects them, in several places, to intolerance, even persecution. Within normative Islam, the most notable major division is between the Shi`i and the Sunni traditions. The differences between these two overarching traditions have their historic origin in the struggle

for the succession of leadership and the transfer of legitimacy following the death of the Prophet Mohammad.

Though they represent only a small percentage of Muslims worldwide, the Shi`a are numerically dominant in Iran and Iraq. Although they are a minority in the Lebanese population, the Shi`a represent the largest grouping in Lebanon's potpourri of minorities. The Shi`a have frequently viewed themselves as relatively powerless, but they stand today newly empowered by events, including but not limited to the historic achievement of the Islamic revolution in Iran which ousted the late shah. The Shi`a have included in their numbers many poor members of their society that now see they can affect the course of their own lives and the lives of others. Thus, while the unity of Islam is a reality in Muslim rites and piety, differences and tensions within Islam are critical elements. Outside Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, Sunni Muslims make up the dominant population in the remainder of the Middle East, yet the religious minorities that dot the landscape remain factors in the configuration of power. Additionally, political divisions—reflected in the competition for dominance in the Islamic world by forces centered in such differing locations as Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia—create important dynamics.

Given these dynamics, the Shi`a in the Gulf region of the Middle East may be viewed as having natural links with Iraqi or Iranian Shi`a. Apart from oil politics, Iraq's attack on Kuwait may thus be understood as a dominantly Shi`i population standing over against a nation that is an extension of Saudi Arabia's power base, with all the flavor of one segment of Islam confronting another. Similarly, the struggles of the Kurds may be perceived through the lens of whether a particular Kurdish population is Sunni or Shi`i. These perceptions, while having validity, do not explain political dynamics in any simple way. The use of religion does not always create the political results that leaders might wish, as is evident, for example, in the essential failure of Iran's attempts in the past to organize Kurds in Iraq through religio-political loyalties.

Islam today is experiencing a revival in its power and influence, both upon its own adherents and upon society. The contemporary Islamic revival around the globe is interpreted by some as the equivalent of a modern crusade, similar to those of the Christians in the Middle Ages or,

by extension, of Zionists who created the state of Israel in 1948. Appropriately, Islamic revival can be seen as a counteroffensive reclaiming and defending what is central to Islamic thought and culture in the face of historic and contemporary onslaughts, particularly from the West. Western culture itself is understood to have grown from and to be influenced, even today, by historic Christendom. Religious incursions upon Islam thus include the arrival of non-Orthodox expressions of Christianity in Islam's historic heartland in the Middle East, but also the Jewish presence since the creation of the state of Israel.

Political and cultural evolution in the Middle East reflects fundamental historic realities. For nearly a half-millennium (1453–1917), Ottoman rule extended from the Balkans through Turkey to the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf and from the Red Sea, across North Africa in the other direction. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire did not bring political freedom to the Middle East. Instead, new, Western forms of colonialism appeared. French, Italian, and British “mandates” were carved out of the former Ottoman Empire by the victors of World War I. These mandates were created without great regard for traditional family/tribal patterns often embodied in kingdoms with royal families. Furthermore, the mandates were carved out with little attention to historic or natural boundaries. The mandates brought to the already-existing complexities of the Middle East an overlay of French, English, and Italian political and legal systems, cultural and linguistic influences. Later, World War II brought an end to this mandate system, but did not end its legacy. As a result, the Middle East today has modern “states” that often are not coterminous with “peoples” (in common Middle Eastern terminology described as “nations”). The modern states are challenged to build Western-style national identities among their populations. Peoples, often divided between states, are challenged to reunite. From all sides, there is a general desire to find some means to express one or another form of unity within some acceptable political concept.

Modernization has moved inevitably forward through the historic processes that have played out in the Middle East. Much of this modernization has been affirmed in the region. Yet tension focuses on the selectivity required: how to preserve central traditional value patterns in the face of the most negative aspects of modernization; how to adopt and adapt the

most useful aspects for the well-being of growing societies. For example, modern technology is generally affirmed by those promoting Islamic revival, while the philosophies out of which this technology developed are rejected. Modern economic development has created divisions between countries and within countries—externally, reflecting the uneven distribution of the region's major economic resources; internally, reflecting divisions between elites and the masses. (Elites in the region are often extended families—sometimes royal families—that have traditional control and/or ownership of the lands.) Oil income has enabled some countries to expend enormous amounts of money on the import or development of technological or military structures and equipment, sometimes more for internal security purposes than for external defense or aggression.

In the face of modern divisions, two notable organizing principles have been espoused to recapture a sense of wholeness and identity in major segments of the region. Neither is a conflict-free option.

Pan-Islam is an effort to gain coherence by uniting all Muslims. Christians, Jews, and other minorities point out, however, that they are also indigenous to the region and have been deeply rooted there throughout their entire histories. Furthermore, the stretch of the Islamic world itself extends far beyond the Middle East, deep into Africa and as far as the Philippines and Indonesia.

The Pan-Arab movement seeks to unify around an ethnic-linguistic identity. The Pan-Arab focus has not been limited to Muslims, but has included the significant numbers of Arab Christians in Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Syria, and Iraq. Yet not all people in the Middle East are ethnically Arab. Kurds, Persians, Turks, Armenians, and Assyrians, among others, have their own languages and cultures. Kurds, Persians, and Turks share with the majority of Arabs their Muslim identity. Armenians and Assyrians are traditionally totally Christian in identity.

The search for a unifying force that would bring together all peoples in a given geographic space, or all people of the region, has not yet been successful.

Israel is often cited as the only democracy in the Middle East. This understanding may be qualified, even challenged. It is true that Israel has important democratic political structures. Both its founders and newer citizens have brought historic democratic principles with them, and it enjoys continuing backing from Western powers. Like many other countries with democratic forms, Israel may still lack the ability to offer all its citizens—especially, but not exclusively, women and those who are non-Jewish—full and equal access to its benefits. Other countries in the Middle East also have some democratic forms, but do not give all their citizens the full protection those forms might help provide.

Turkey became a secular nationalist republic in 1923; its 1982 constitution provides for a parliamentary republic. Lebanon is a republic with a constitution dating from 1926, operating with a parliament. Lebanon has functioned under the National Pact of 1943 that recognized Lebanon's religious divisions through creating an agreed balance of powers. Syria is a socialist popular democracy, with the power focused in a strong president who is required by law to be a Muslim, in a state dominated by one party (the Baath, or Renaissance, Party). Jordan is a constitutional monarchy with a legislative assembly. Iran was a constitutional monarchy until the late Shah was overthrown in 1979. It has become a constitutional Islamic theocracy, whose government includes both a parliament and mechanisms for Islamic guidance. Iraq is a republic, although it is governed by a military leadership rooted in its Baath Party. While Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy controlled by the Saudi royal family, Kuwait—which is also a monarchy, controlled by the Al Sabah family—is moving haltingly, perhaps even reluctantly, toward more representative institutions.

Movement toward democratic values and any increase in democratic structures is bound to be a hesitant affair in the Middle East, reflecting—among other things—internal tensions and the continuing presence of traditional leadership patterns. Western powers are certainly in a position to encourage political evolution in the direction westerners believe to be important. These same powers, however, may also unintentionally excite more radical political responses. Western governments' policies, together with Western practices and cultural influences, are frequently seen as threatening to or condescending toward the dominant cultural and religious values and traditions of the Middle East. Western nations may

be faulted for supporting less-representative governmental forms or practices in order to ensure that Middle Eastern governments have the ability to control policies and practices in ways favorable to Western priorities and interests.

Many of the radical responses to Western pressures create difficult religious dynamics. Muslims find themselves standing against one another. Religious minorities become more marginalized or excluded, sometimes suffering the effects of conflicts in which they are caught in the middle.

The major religious traditions of the Middle East—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all understand God to be profoundly at work in human affairs. Theologically and ideologically, institutionally and sociologically, the predominant forms of these religious traditions in the Middle East are community-oriented rather than individually-oriented. The radical autonomy of individuals in society, often highly valued in the West, is not part of the traditional social milieu of the Middle East. Families remain the functioning basic components in the social systems. Persons are generally recognized as entering their religious community through birth and are expected to remain in the community of birth. In response to modern life and political pressures, when segments of the religious community become radicalized, there may be serious tension within the community itself. This may express itself in political life. In Israel, secular Jews have very different hopes for themselves and their state than the most strict Orthodox Jews. Sometimes disproportionate power falls to small religious parties who may be needed to create coalition governments. In Turkey, a Muslim nation that is a constitutionally secular state, increased power has gone to Islamists.

Within the dynamics of religious communities in the Middle East, religious minorities may become increasingly marginalized or excluded, sometimes suffering the effects of conflicts in which they are caught in the middle.

Lebanon is a country that has been caught in the middle of international conflict. In Lebanon, "sectarianism" has been a solution to religious problems, but it also fueled internally the civil war, begun in 1975, that had both external and internal causes. Essentially, sectarian formulas for recognizing various religions were a solution to power struggles as

Lebanon evolved as a state. Sectarianism apportioned rights and privileges based on religious identity. The government gained control of its populace through distributing control among its religious communities, the leadership of each of these being expected to discipline and provide services to the people in its particular group. Under the National Pact adopted in 1943, Maronite Christians were guaranteed the presidency of the republic, Sunni Muslims the prime ministership, and Shi'i Muslims the speaker of the parliament. Lebanese Christians, Muslims, and others are divided into various sectarian groups in such a way that no single group at present can claim to be a majority. Problems revolving around sectarianism must be solved in today's reconstruction following war. Christians, who are no longer the majority in Lebanon, will struggle with their hope to maintain a dominant position. Nevertheless, many Christians believe that, as they do this, they maintain a foothold for their co-religionists throughout the region by providing a place where they can be viewed in major national leadership. Given this kind of setting, efforts by Christians to institute and maintain interreligious dialogue are particularly significant. They have a function in nation-building, spiritual sharing, and searching for the common good. Contacts between Christians and Muslims have often been very good, both in neighborhoods and between particular leaders. But major tensions between groups are also the legacy of violent conflict.

Religious minorities in the Middle East struggle to determine what power they may be able to exert appropriately in their societies. But they also struggle fundamentally with what proposals they may offer. In Egypt, intra-Islamic tensions aside, traditional Coptic (i.e., Egyptian) Christians have suffered violence at the hands of Islamists in certain regions of the country. Yet the Copts—linguistically, and sociologically—are essentially the same as their Muslim neighbors. Religion is their primary distinction. In the face of problems they encounter, most Copts would seek some solution that acknowledges Egyptian society consists of more than Muslims. While some would press for radical secularism, other Copts would deem this unrealistic, given the important role of religion in Middle Eastern life. For the latter, some significant form of recognition of Christians in the national fabric becomes important.

Members of Protestant churches, in particular, struggle with their status as breakaways from Orthodox Christianity in the region within the past two centuries. They deal with tensions between themselves and Orthodox Christians, who view Protestants at once as recent arrivals and as proselytizers who have drawn members of the Orthodox-oriented general Christian populace into others expressions of Christian faith, thus breaking up the unity of the Christian community. This same problem was created by Christians who acknowledged the primacy of the Pope within the past two hundred years, again breaking the unity of the community. But it is Protestants who must deal especially with the additional reality of the evangelizing nature of their Christian commitment. In Iran, traditional Christians have historically been a part of the ethnic Assyrian or Armenian communities. Today, Christians, who are ethnically identical with the general Iranian populace and whose mother tongue is Persian (or Turkish), face the problem of being commonly viewed as having stepped outside the dominant societal group. This factor is often viewed as being related to the assassinations and the imposition of the death penalty on several Protestant Christian leaders. These deaths have occurred since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Establishment of some type of relationship between Muslims and Christians internationally is seen by many as a means for raising mutual trust between people of faith in spite of the tensions created by the ongoing struggles in post-revolutionary Iran. These contacts have not occurred without controversy among Christians.

Christians also work to maintain appropriate contributions to the national struggles of their wider communities. Palestinian Christians consider themselves to be an integral part of the Palestinian people and, throughout the years of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis since the establishment of the Israeli state, they have generally been accepted by their Muslim compatriots as such. Radicalization of segments of the Palestinian Islamic community have made this mutual identification somewhat more difficult, so that an important task remains keeping in close contact with each other on behalf of the future as well as the present.

Christians internationally today struggle with the best ways in which to stand in solidarity with partner Christian churches and their members in the Middle East while, at the same time, expressing a relationship with

the Jewish people. The present peace process, which has demanded international attention and the active involvement of a number of governments around the world, has brought a new challenge to Christians around the world and particularly in the United States. Christians continue their special relationship with fellow Christians, but also increasingly reach out to Muslims and Jews in order to forge bonds of trust that enable mutual efforts toward the hard steps of making peace. Hopes for an end to conflict demand eventual joint participation, and many Christians in the region and beyond believe this can wait no longer.

Christians internationally also struggle with ways to support fellow Christians throughout the Middle East who are facing persecution because of the particular details of their minority status. Renewed efforts in the United States to raise issues of religious freedom abroad will need to address questions about methods to highlight and consider the situation of Christian minorities in the Middle East. But Christians are not the only minority within the region, and Christian efforts on behalf of religious freedom thus raise issues about others who lack sufficient religious liberty, including Muslims who suffer at the hands of fellow Muslims.

While it is important for Christians internationally to help persecuted Christians from the Middle East to seek asylum elsewhere, churches in the Middle East have generally urged their members to remain within the region and to maintain a strong Christian presence and witness through their participation in common life and their faithfulness in Christian living. This presents challenges of discernment for the larger Christian community that must simultaneously encourage Christians to stay where they are and be willing to help those who must leave.

Presbyterians have long had strong relationships with Christians in the Middle East. For well over a century and a half, Presbyterians have been present in mission among the people of the region. Evangelical churches have come into being through these efforts. Today, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has direct partner relationships with Evangelical churches with whom we have shared this extensive history—in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt. But the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) also has newer relationships with bodies such as the Diocese of Jerusalem of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East.

The Middle East is blessed with a regional council of churches that has grown to include all the major Christian families of churches—Evangelical, Orthodox, and Catholic. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has strong relationships with the council. As in relationships with specific churches, Presbyterians in the United States have contributed to and received from the Middle East Council of Churches. Through relationships with the council, as well as through special programmatic thrusts of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we have gained deeper relationships with Orthodox churches.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) **Commend the Middle East Council of Churches for its efforts to further Christian unity and the unity of the human community, recognizing its efforts in interreligious dialogue, particularly between Christians and Muslims; and recommend that the Worldwide Ministries Division offer tangible support to the council in its dialogue work, as requested by the council.**
- (2) **Commend the World Council of Churches for its efforts in interreligious dialogue through programs with particular importance to Middle Eastern religious communities—especially for its leadership in the development of joint Christian-Muslim attention to human-rights issues; its convening of Jews, Christians, and Muslims to discuss Jerusalem; and its attention to situations where international Christian contacts break the isolation of local Christian minorities—and recommend Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) involvement in these WCC projects, as appropriate.**
- (3) **Affirm the spirit of commitments of the 199th General Assembly (1987): to support partner churches as they search for full freedom to witness to their faith; to work for full religious freedom—including the right to practice the faith of one's choice—and for equality of citizenship for all persons in the societies in which they live, whether Muslims, Christians, Jews, or persons of other faiths; and to monitor the political use of religion for purposes of power and oppression.**

- (4) Urge the General Assembly Council and the Office of the General Assembly to continue work on issues of religious persecution, including efforts to respond to needs of asylum-seekers who have left Middle Eastern nations where they have suffered persecution.
- (5) Urge the General Assembly Council, through its Worldwide Ministries Division, to maintain appropriate contacts with Jews and Muslims, especially through ecumenical and multi-faith organizations; and urge the General Assembly Council, through its Worldwide Ministries Division, to assist congregations and middle governing bodies in establishing and maintaining similar relationships locally and regionally.
- (6) Urge the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program and the Washington Office to highlight the religious nature of peacemaking efforts in the Middle East as they carry out programming related to the region.

### III CONCERNING HUMAN RIGHTS



A CONTEMPORARY AMOS finds many human-rights concerns in the Middle East. The prophet's denunciation of the nations' abuses and his cry to let justice roll down find modern expression in the 1948 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." As the statutes of the Lord provided the norm for the prophet, so is the Universal Declaration to provide "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance."<sup>1</sup>

The rights that are asserted include life, liberty, and security of person; freedom from slavery and torture; equal treatment before the law without arbitrary arrest and with the presumption of innocence; freedom to have nationality and move from and return to one's country and to receive asylum; marriage by mutual consent; freedom to change religion; freedom of expression and assembly; periodic and genuine elections; a level of social security that guarantees dignity and development of one's personality; freedom to work with equal pay and organize trade unions, as well as to have leisure; a standard of living providing sufficient food, clothing, housing, and medical care throughout one's life, with special attention to mothers and children; education focusing on all these rights; enjoyment of the arts and science, and any benefits accruing from production or authorship. Everyone also has duties to the larger community in which alone the free and full development of one's personality is possible. All these rights are to be limited only for the purpose of ensuring these rights for everyone.

Two other normative United Nations' instruments have been added to this declaration; they are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The three constitute the International Bill of Human Rights. (There are twenty-one other agreements that relate to human rights, the most recent being the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1990.) Countries in the Middle East are not alone in having a mixed record of ratification.

It is imperative to work with Middle Eastern countries in the process of ratification and implementation of these fundamental agreements.

## A DIFFERING RELIGIOUS VALUE

In addressing the numerous human-rights violations in the Middle East and in endeavoring to apply the qualities of the ideal life to the region, one basic perspective needs to be kept in mind. Inherent in the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" is the tension between individual and community rights and duties. The West, out of whose tradition this declaration primarily came, has, since the Enlightenment, focused on the individual. Many societies around the world, and certainly Islamic ones in their struggle to achieve the just society, focus on the community.

Islamic law (shari`a) is viewed as having been given by God; human rights are not inherent in human nature, but are divinely granted and therefore Muslims are enjoined to obey the divine law rather than place importance on individual rights . . . [T]he exercise of individual liberties is not appropriate behavior when it conflicts with the common and collective good. Further and in marked contrast to the ideals of Western society, Islamic society sees freedoms and rights as means and not ends. Muslims are expected to work for the good of the general society, which will lead to the protection of rights. Human rights, then, are seen more as a way to better society than as protection for the individual.<sup>2</sup>

Within Islamic societies there are schools of thought about how to apply current standards of human rights to traditional perspectives and practices. Scholars debate the issues in the Middle East and in the West. Islamist movements, defined as those that seek to order society according to shari`a, are most evident in Iran, Algeria, Pakistan, and Sudan, and also in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood or Palestine's Hamas. While there is violence in these areas, sometimes centering on the resistance of entrenched politicians to share power, there is an underlying effort to achieve a just society, demonstrated in some Islamist groups' furnishing services that governments have failed to provide.

The West focuses on violent aspects within the Middle East and how they impact the West. While this is unavoidable, it is more important to develop understanding of how Islam "sees rights as contingent entitlements and secondary to the welfare of the community." As a number of states in the Middle East are governed arbitrarily (some by secular or military one-party systems and others by religious autocracies), independent Islamic and human-rights' groups have come to share an interest in "the denunciation of arbitrary government, the promotion of governmental accountability, and the preservation of the rule of law,"<sup>3</sup> and to work for a common-denominator understanding that will promote an evolutionary growth toward overcoming serious human-rights abuses.

Within the Middle East, there are numerous human-rights groups that address the basic issues and the day-to-day abuses. In Arab countries, Muslims and Christians often work together; in Israel/Palestine, the Jews, Muslims, and Christians cooperate. The following groups illustrate the variety of organizations: the region-wide Arab Organization for Human Rights, the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, the Center for Human-Rights Legal Aid (Egypt), the Algerian League for Human Rights, the B'Tselem in Israel, the Al Haq in the West Bank, and the Gaza Center for Rights and Law. Iran, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Libya forbid such groups, although there are exile groups focusing on these countries, such as the Paris-based Committees for the Defense of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria. The courageous efforts of these organizations need to be supported.

## HUMAN-RIGHTS VIOLATIONS<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, the following representative actions constitute violations when measured by the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights":

- ❖ It is common for security forces to keep people incommunicado and to use various forms of torture, with death occurring far too often. Victims or their families often gain no satisfaction from the courts. This can be found in Iran, or Israel, or Palestine.
- ❖ Executions for political purposes take place, with governments sometimes committing these as part of their antiterrorist or antirevolutionary campaigns. Actions by Iraq come readily to mind.
- ❖ In many countries, a politically independent judiciary does not exist and in some countries security suspects are handled by military courts that do not provide for any judicial review. Abuses are found both in Arab countries and in Israel.
- ❖ Many minorities throughout the region are subjected to discriminatory practices that restrict their freedoms or take their lives. This is especially notable in relation to the Kurds. Christians in Egypt have documented harsh oppression or denial of the right to build church buildings.
- ❖ Freedom of the media is curtailed in many countries as governments control the contents for real or supposed security reasons. Israel is the major exception. Lebanon was equally open until the fall of 1996, and Turkey does not restrict except in relation to events among the Kurds and Armenians.
- ❖ Many countries deny permits for peaceful assembly, and opposition parties often find themselves struggling against heavy government controls, or are prohibited. Examples exist in Egypt and Lebanon.
- ❖ Often when elections take place there are serious limitations to their effectiveness, such as Kuwait's limiting the vote only to certain male citizens.

- ❖ The occupation by Israel of southern Lebanon, the Golan Heights, and most of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continues to infringe upon a wide variety of people's rights.
- ❖ In the continuing struggle over these occupied territories, civilian populations in Israel, Lebanon, and Palestine are subjected to bombings or rockets by both state and resistance-group actions.
- ❖ Women in many countries, both nationals and foreigners, suffer from forced dress codes or restricted educational and professional opportunities, and from genital mutilation or general sexual abuse, very often without any judicial recourse whatsoever.
- ❖ As a result of many of these abuses and because of recent or ongoing conflicts, many infants and children throughout the region are especially vulnerable. The largest number affected are found in Iraq, suffering from both the policies of their government and the ongoing effects of the embargo.

Addressing these violations requires both internal actions by citizens and governments, cooperation by the international community out of the sensitivities mentioned above, and confrontation by international bodies. For the United States, with cordial relationships and foreign aid extended to many countries in the region, it will require assessing how such aid and relationships can effectively become instruments for promoting human rights and democratic reforms.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) **Express its prayerful concern for the churches in the Middle East as they minister in an environment that is often hostile and that contains many human-rights abuses, some of which are directed at those churches. It sends greetings to the churches and pledges to work with them in finding ways to implement international human-rights standards in both the Middle East and in the West, out of the conviction that all of our countries stand under the judgment of God and need the mercy of God in order to promote the peace and justice of God in this world.**



- (2) Reaffirm the action of the General Assembly of 1949 in supporting the United Nations “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” and lifts up the following elements as matters of specific and current concern in various countries of the Middle East, as follows:

Article 3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person. . . .

Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. . . .

Article 9. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile. . . .

Article 15. Everyone has the right to a nationality. . . .

Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his [one’s] religion or belief, and . . . to manifest his [one’s] religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. . . .

Article 25. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services. . . .

Article 28. Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.<sup>5</sup>

- (3) Call upon the United States government and all governments of the Middle East to ratify all covenants and conventions of the “United Nations Declaration of Human Rights” and to adhere in policy and practice to the values espoused in it.
- (4) Call upon the government of the United States to adhere to U.S. law concerning the denial of foreign assistance to any country engaged in a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights.
- (5) Call upon the appropriate offices of the General Assembly Council to continue and to promote discussion with Muslim groups in the United States and in the Middle East about the

nature of human rights and the implementation of the United Nations human-rights instruments, and about how to promote an appreciative understanding of Islam in face of the current anti-Islamic mood in the United States.

- (6) Call upon the appropriate offices of the General Assembly Council to continue and to promote ecumenical and interfaith dialogue with Jewish groups in the United States and in Israel about the implementation of the United Nations human-rights instruments in the continuing crisis between Israelis and Palestinians and Arab states.
- (7) Request its various entities to pursue appropriate ways to encourage Middle Eastern governments to implement all United Nations human-rights statements.
- (8) Request the appropriate offices of the General Assembly Council to find ways to encourage the work of human-rights groups throughout the Middle East, to foster the monitoring of human rights by international and nongovernmental organizations, and to develop a regional Court of Human Rights.
- (9) Urge all Presbyterians who visit the region, whether for pilgrimage, business, or pleasure, to seek out the Christian communities, join with them in worship, and become acquainted with their human-rights struggles, and to seek ways to express Christian love, peace, and justice.

# IV CONCERNING POLITICAL VIOLENCE



VIOLENCE IS A CHRONIC PHENOMENON in the contemporary Middle East. Violence involves, by definition, the violation of the integrity or well-being of an individual or a community. Its forms are many: physical, emotional, psychic. They impact individuals, communities, and states in different ways. Acts or circumstances include war, torture, murder, rape, intimidation, beatings by police or military personnel, the deliberate killing of the dogs in a community, a hijacking or random bombing, roundups and incarceration without judicial process, withholding of food from a child. These are specific in nature and considered crimes in most societies. Violence may be perpetrated by individuals, groups, or the agents of states. Violence, used as an instrument of state, may be used for repressive, oppressive, or aggressive purposes—used to prevent change, protect the status quo, or to bring about dramatic change.

Violence can be used deliberately to create fear. Fear may be sought as an end in itself or for political or economic purposes. Fear can be momentary, in anticipation or response to an event. Fear may be inherent in daily circumstance—living under repressive dictatorial rule, dwelling in occupied territories, trying to survive in the context of civil or international war, or in the face of economic deprivation. Violence is ever near us in various forms.

Fear is a consequence of violent acts. In some cases, those acts become defined as terrorist acts. Terrorism is defined by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation as

the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian

population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social goals.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, whether or not a particular act of violence is considered an act of terrorism is determined by the “motivation” of the group or individuals performing the act. This, in turn, will be perceived differently based on whether those interpreting the act see it as part of a heroic struggle or antagonistic and thus terrorist. These interpretations then lead to portrayals of persons or groups as “heroes” or “fanatic mental misfits.”

Understanding violence and terrorism in any situation is particularly challenging. In the Middle East, each of our religious traditions has been used to justify and/or encourage the use of violence. Therefore, finding ways of addressing the underlying causes and ending violence is even more challenging.

## POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East is a region defined by intersecting struggles. One is the struggle for and against modernization following the legacies of colonialism, two world wars, and Western imposition of a state and population. A second struggle is for viable forms of governance in a region where many state boundaries were arbitrarily created by former, though still influential, colonial powers. Traditional patterns of governing have been autocratic and authoritarian, not democratic. The third struggle is between Shiite and Sunni Muslim understandings of Islam, the nature of law and society, and between secular and religious perceptions of the proper place for Islam in the modern world. There is also the struggle for survival of the three major indigenous faith traditions—Judaism (with its future now embodied in the state of Israel), Christianity (its future in the Middle East in doubt), and Islam (beset and divided). Each has a history of suffering, views of land and community, and attachment to sacred symbols. Each has its own tragic, sometimes dark history.

Interactive with these struggles is the dominant influence of the world’s superpower, the United States, driven by the assumption that its economic and strategic interests are at stake and by a unique relation to Israel wherein it sees Israel both as asset and as victim.

## VIOLENCE IN RECENT MIDDLE EASTERN HISTORY

Middle East violence historically has no clear beginning and no apparent ending. Almost every user of violence justifies its use as a response to a prior injustice, or as preemptive of "inevitable" or forthcoming violence. Chronologies and scorekeeping are usually selective and one-sided, and are therefore helpful only when used to prevent or counteract distortion.

In the unequal relationships between an occupier power and the occupied, or between a superpower and minor powers, the instruments of violence are inherently unequal. Those possessing primary power lay claim to legitimacy for their instruments and use, and to brand the instruments of others as inhumane or criminal.

## THE RECENT PAST

A cursory look at the last two years reveals the scope of violence. Ongoing incidents tragically occurring between Israelis and Palestinians, studded by spectaculars: the suicide bombing of an Israeli bus; a massacre of Muslims at prayer. Ongoing military exchanges between Israel and Hezbollah escalated in 1996 into a massive Israel attack on Lebanon and the shelling of a United Nations' haven. There have been bombings (truck, car, etc.) in Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan, New York, Syria, and Saudi Arabia; assassinations (Prime Minister Rabin), and attempted government overthrows (Turkey, Qatar, Bahrain); violence in Iraq, Egypt, etc. between Sunni and Shiite Muslims; revelations of murders in Lebanon by Christian groups of other Christians and Muslims; the uncovering of mass executions of prisoners; and, further away, Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs in interactive violence in India and Pakistan.

The events are too numerous to identify all. What is clear is that violence is not confined to one country, or perpetrated by one people. What is also clear is that global response is erratic and inconsistent.

## UNITED STATES' RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

United States' response to violence in the Middle East appears to be heavily influenced by its relation to Israel. The unique relationship of the two nations is reflected in the United States' interpretation of events

and the flow of its economic and military support. Sufficient attention has not been given to other nations in the region unless the United States is the prime target of violence there. For example, at an antiterrorism summit in March 1996, in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, attended by more than twenty world leaders, little attention was given to the social forces fueling violence or to means for addressing the underlying causes that foster social confrontation. Nevertheless, much rhetoric was devoted to establishing villains and to discovering or providing means to combat acts of violence.

For decades, U.S. partners have included some of the most autocratic regimes in the area, regimes that have repressed their own peoples and opposed democratization. For many years, the U.S. did not adequately support Palestinian efforts to achieve a redress of their grievances through positive political processes. United States' arms flooded the region. United States' response to violence and terrorism in the Middle East has been reactive.

The political alliances of the United States in the region have been reflected in the way nonallied countries have been labeled as "terrorist" or "terrorist exploiters." This has led to popular perceptions that these are "rogue" or "pariah" countries. These countries now include Iraq, Iran, Libya, and, from time to time, Syria. Pressures are placed on those governments as punishment or even to overthrow them. The perceptions make it easy to dismiss the viewpoints of the pariah countries.

However, it is very difficult to prove state-sponsored terrorism. It is also difficult for a country to be made accountable for acts of individual citizens or groups that are conducted on foreign soil. However, the acts then become the justification for political measures taken against the countries of origin.

Political and economic isolation of "pariah" states has become standard practice by the United States. The efficacy of such practice has yet to be proved as a method of conflict resolution, or of positive change. It can hardly be used as a means to reconciliation. Witness the effort to continue isolation of Iran and Libya through the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act passed by Congress in 1996. It seeks to determine the practices and policies of

other countries as they deal with Iran and Libya. The sanctions act authorizes the president of the United States to penalize foreign companies or countries that invest in the oil or natural gas sectors of either country. Opposing the act, European/NATO allies point to its extraterritorial character, the effort to give U.S. law control over the sovereign right of other countries. By some it is a United States violation of international law governing free trade. By others it is a call for “secondary boycotts.”

Another instrument, sanctions (such as those currently imposed by the United Nations, primarily at U.S. insistence, on Iraq and Libya), while arguably a preferred method of dealing with an aggressor or violator, are not without their own violence.

Economic embargoes particularly impacting import of food and medical supplies tend to impact the masses of people more than they impact governments. There is a tradition that considers them as acts of war.

Two interrelated perceptions are influencing American understanding of violence in the Middle East:

- ❖ One is the growing fear and demonization of Islam and Muslims through constant reference to Islamic Fundamentalism and the Islamic concept of Jihad. A growing body of literature in the United States, both in popular media and in academic circles, argues that a clash of cultures—Western/Secularist/Christian versus Islamic—has replaced the ideological struggle between East and West, and the future of the world will depend upon the outcome of that struggle.
- ❖ The other is the stereotyping of Arabs as shifty, sinister, and terrorist, reflecting ongoing patterns of racism in American life. Caricatured swarthy, heavy beards, or bandit-like headwear generate uneasiness. Again, the media and the entertainment industry foster and undergird the popular perceptions, which ultimately reflect and are reflected in government policy.

THE CHURCH AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

The church has recognized the legitimate right of the state to self-defense, the right of self-determination, and the right of oppressed peoples to

resistance and revolution. This has been, for instance, expressed in the recognition of the right of both Israelis and Palestinians to self-determination and statehood. The failure to achieve that for the Palestinians led inexorably to the assumption by some that the only means for change is violence.

In the Middle East, the PC(USA) has condemned the use of violence in all of its forms. In the resolution of conflict, the church has consistently called for nonviolent means, means that of necessity involve the inclusion of all affected parties to be at the table. Thus, it urged negotiated means rather than military means to resolve the Persian Gulf crisis. Concerned that arms buildups tend to foster the use of violence, the church has regularly called for an end to the arms race in the Middle East and the United States participation in it. It has supported the United Nations as the instrument through which peace might be sought and achieved. It has recognized that the United States cannot be a credible mediator or facilitator in the resolution of a conflict where its own interests seem dominant, or where it has unconditionally placed its weight behind one party.

The church has also expressed concern about United States’ support to repressive regimes, those that have consistently violated the human rights of their own people. It has seen as shortsighted expediency such support, recognizing that when change does come, violent struggle is most likely to be the methodology of change.

The church community has also sought to provide humanitarian assistance to those most in need throughout the Middle East.

Finally, the church recognizes that the pluralistic character of religion in the Middle East requires the building of interfaith relations and trust, rather than the fostering of fear, suspicion, and alienation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Presbyterians are mindful of the pervasive use of violence to achieve political ends in many parts of the world, including the Middle East. They are also aware of its deliberate use by governments as well as by conflicting political and religious groups throughout the region and elsewhere. They discern the conflict of values**

between the right of self-defense and the right of resistance, and are conscious in matters of civil strife of the difficulty of always making clear distinctions between innocent individuals and systems in which individuals benefit. Yet, believing that there are alternatives to violence, the 209th General Assembly (1997) does the following:

- (1) Deplores the continued patterns of violence found throughout the Middle East; laments the resulting loss of life, the psychological trauma, and the physical destruction; and condemns all acts of intentional, indiscriminate violence affecting innocent people.
- (2) Calls on all parties to work together to prevent violence and to seek nonviolent resolution of conflict and peaceful methods of change, for governments to hear and respond to the aggrieved, whether minority religious or ethnic groups, or those deprived because of economic and political structures, and to seek the meaningful inclusion of representation in the processes of governance.
- (3) Calls for increased efforts to provide the technological means for preventing indiscriminate uses of violence.
- (4) Calls for the development and recognition of a permanent international criminal tribunal as part of the United Nations' system for jurisdiction in cases where violence is used in an international context.
- (5) Cautions against the use of rhetoric, labels, or other designations that stereotype or brand some states, groups, or individuals, while ignoring or excusing the actions of others, recognizing that such rhetoric complicates the resolution of conflict.
- (6) Calls upon the United States government to initiate discussions with the governments of Iran, Iraq, and Libya in an effort toward the end of achieving improved relations that should enable mutual communication.

- (7) Calls for greater attention to be given by the international community to the underlying causes of tension, conflict, and violence in the Middle East, realizing that violence will not cease until the causes are appropriately addressed.

# V CONCERNING ARMS CONTROL



WORLD ARMS TRADE has declined in dollar value in the last several years due to the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Russian export trade. The U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency calculates that in 1994 (the last year for which there is comprehensive global data), world arms deliveries fell 22 percent from the previous year, to \$22 billion.<sup>7</sup> World arms sales agreements, which are announcements of intent and do not measure actual weapons deliveries, also declined, from \$46 billion in 1993 to \$38 billion in 1994.<sup>8</sup>

Three regions—the Middle East, East Asia, and Western Europe—are the dominant arms importing regions, accounting for 76 percent of the world market from 1992–94.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. was the predominant supplier, providing more than half the arms imports in both the Middle East and East Asia. Thus, the Middle East plays a significant role in the global flow of arms, impoverishing local economies and destabilizing the region.

A cornerstone of the 1980 Camp David accords, brokered by President Carter between Israel and Egypt, was the American promise of ongoing preferential access to U.S. aid money and arms. That commitment continues to this day.

Israel, the leading beneficiary of U.S. military and economic aid, used U.S.-supplied arms in its recent deadly assault in Lebanon, in which an ambulance and a U.N. refugee camp were apparently targeted as they were thought to be shielding Hezbollah guerrillas. Under surplus grant arms programs, Israel has received nearly 65,000 M-16A1 rifles, 2,500 M-204 grenade<sup>10</sup> launchers, 24 Apache attack helicopters, 65 F-15 and F-16 fighter-bomber jets.

Under the excess arms programs, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force are transferring relatively sophisticated systems. Following the Persian Gulf War, the Army gave Israel surplus Apache attack helicopters, Blackhawk transport helicopters, Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, and Patriot tactical antimissiles. In 1995, four M-1 Abrams tank turrets were provided to Egypt as excess defense articles. (Egypt is building 535 M-1A1 tanks under license from General Dynamics.) All of these systems were fielded with U.S. forces in the 1980s.

For 1996, the total arms transfer agreements to twenty-seven countries and the United States grew from \$7.31 billion to \$11.9 billion. In this program, Saudi Arabia leads the list with \$3.39 billion projected arms imports value. Egypt is in second place with \$1.72 billion<sup>11</sup> in agreements. Sales to Israel are not included in this program. The Saudi programs include five types of aircraft and extensive support facilities for them, Saudi personal training program in the U.S., and services enabling an airborne surveillance system. Export agreements to Egypt include surface-to-air missiles, two frigates, and a variety of other missiles, ammunition, and support equipment.

For fiscal year 1995, the Defense Security Assistance Agency reported foreign military sales of \$661 million to Israel, with deliveries of \$331 million; \$1.1 billion to Egypt with \$1.7 billion delivered (reflecting agreements of prior years); and \$485 million<sup>12</sup> in sales to Saudi Arabia, with \$3.6 billion in deliveries from prior year agreements.

A separate program of Foreign Military Financing provided Egypt with \$1.3 billion of credit for U.S. weapons or training and Israel with \$1.8 billion.<sup>13</sup> Those amounts have remained relatively stable every year since the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

Loopholes in federal reporting requirements of weapons sales make it extremely difficult to accurately portray the extent of recent weapons deals. Only sales over \$40 million must be made public; repeated sales, each less than \$40 million,<sup>14</sup> may go on without being reported.

Weapons of mass destruction continue to play a significant role in the security balances of the Middle East. Iraqi rhetoric leading up to the

Persian Gulf War threatened first-strike use of chemical weapons against Israel, while Israel made clear that such use would cause it to turn its nuclear weapons against Iraq. Such threats by both Israel and the U.S. are widely believed to have been a critical factor deterring Iraq from using chemical or biological weapons against Israel. Whether or to what extent Iraq used chemical weapons on the battlefield remains controversial.

During the years of negotiations since the war, fears on all sides of the others' chemical or nuclear weapons have dogged efforts to build regional stability. Israel has consolidated its nuclear monopoly by developing a multifaceted network of nuclear weapons and delivery systems. Israel has indicated that it is moving toward a "second strike" nuclear capacity, meaning that some portion of its nuclear forces would survive an attack. Israel has indicated interest in acquiring U.S. Tomahawk cruise missiles. Arab states have repeatedly called for Israel to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which it has refused to do.

Despite the most intrusive international inspection regime ever undertaken by an international body, Iraq still retains unaccounted Scud missiles and a nuclear research and development program outside the United Nations monitoring regime. Iran has equipped its military with chemical weapons and maintains research and production facilities. No evidence is known of Iran moving toward nuclear weapons. Iraq, Syria, and Egypt have all acquired types of Scud missiles; deliveries to Iran of North Korean missiles are estimated to begin in 1997. These developments in nonconventional weapons are particularly troubling with the shifts in strategic thinking and the increased strain on regional negotiations brought about by the Likud party assuming power in Israel. Entry-into-force of the treaty banning chemical weapons in April 1997 offers a moment of hope to the region for states pursuing chemical weapons capacities to change course and join the treaty.

The Presbyterian church is already on record in support of a code of conduct for U.S. arms sales. Such a code would prohibit U.S. sales to countries that abuse human rights, conduct warfare, do not practice democracy, and do not cooperate with the United Nations Arms Transfer Registry. Parallel efforts to establish codes of conduct are underway in the European Union and at the United Nations.

Implementation of such a code would increase the U.S. ability to raise human rights and humanitarian concerns in its dealings with Middle Eastern countries.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) **Renew its call on the United States Congress to enact a Code of Conduct governing United States arms exports.**
- (2) **Call upon all Middle Eastern countries to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention, and vigorously adhere to the provisions of these treaties.**
- 3) **Call upon all states involved in the region to stop pursuing regional dominance through weapons acquisition and to return to good faith negotiations as the only path to genuine security and stability in the region.**

# VI CONCERNING ECONOMIC ISSUES



THE ECONOMIC PICTURE in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is not encouraging in terms of broad human welfare, long-term development, or hopes for a lasting peace. The area is home to about 6 percent of the world's people; it is well endowed with natural resources—including two-thirds of known petroleum reserves;<sup>15</sup> breathtaking tourist attractions; many talented, well-educated people; and longstanding economic contacts with much of the world. But it also has serious economic problems that threaten to overwhelm all these benefits.

The region's annual population growth rate of 2.7 percent (down from 3.2 percent in the mid 1980s) is second only to Sub-Saharan Africa. Population will double in just over a quarter century unless fertility rates continue to fall. With a shortage of good farmland and a scarcity of water, the area is already the least food-self-sufficient region of the world,<sup>16</sup> and the struggle to feed a growing population will strain resources and ingenuity even more in the future.

Imported food has long been a necessity. The Middle East is not self-sufficient in any of the basic categories of grains, sugar, oils, or meat, and the percentage imported was higher in 1990 than in 1970.<sup>17</sup> Food self-sufficiency in most countries of the region will not be possible without massive shifts of resources to agriculture, if then. Trade is thus less of an option for the Middle East than most areas—some regard it as a necessity for survival—yet only about 3 to 4 percent of global trade involves the region.

The Middle East petroleum producing countries, of course, have realized immense trade revenues since the 1970s when oil prices increased almost thirty-fold in less than a decade. But most of the region's countries and

peoples have benefitted little. Indeed, countries without oil have paid the price in part by having less to invest in other economic activities. Meanwhile, most petroleum exporters have imported lavishly and planned poorly so that even their economies are in trouble as petroleum prices have fallen.

Throughout the region, economies are characterized by little investment in industry, modern communications technologies, or research and development. Consequently, per capita output is not only low but actually declined at a rate of 2.4 percent per year from 1980 to 1992. This has led to rising poverty and joblessness, and real wages that are virtually the same now as in 1970.<sup>18</sup>

Radical Islamic movements are fed by these economic realities. Such data imply not only immense human suffering, but may also portend a level of social unrest that will make virtually every government in the region vulnerable and conflicts between states all too likely, as struggles to control water resources rival those to control petroleum revenues. The tendency of governments in the region is to respond to social challenges rooted in economic need and inequality with force rather than changed policies. The evidence is clear in the fact that for every one dollar that Middle East countries spend on education and health care, they spend \$166 on military preparedness.<sup>19</sup> Such shortsightedness and indifference may not long survive the challenges of frustrated and angry peoples mobilized under the banner of religious discontent and anti-Western sentiments.

Economic development, shared with a measure of equity, will likely be the price of achieving political and resource stability throughout the Middle East. This should be viewed as a moral imperative not only by the countries and peoples of the region, but by the rest of the world as well. It would be hard to imagine resolving specific problems and conflicts in the Middle East apart from seeing them in the context of a development/equity framework.

## THE ECONOMIC RESIDUE OF WARS

The aftermath of wars, both civil and international, continue to cause human and economic hardship. Lebanon has now experienced five years of peace after a fifteen-year civil war. It has also endured two destructive



invasions and continued periodic bombings by Israel resulting from tensions over its occupation of a self-proclaimed "security zone" carved out of southern Lebanon. The Lebanese government has made major strides in rebuilding parts of Beirut, but the leading role formerly played by Lebanon as financial center for the Middle East is far from being restored. When and if peace with Israel is achieved and Syria's thirty thousand troops withdrawn, Lebanon will face equally great challenges in rebuilding many villages, restoring a viable agricultural structure, and reintegrating all segments of the nation into a single economy. Unless international funds are available to assist these adjustments, life will continue to be a matter of great hardship and struggle for most Lebanese people, even in the absence of war.

Iraq faces a more deadly circumstance. Following the Persian Gulf War (Desert Storm) in 1991, the United Nations (at U.S. urging) instituted an economic embargo on Iraq until the international community was satisfied that weapons of mass destruction had been totally eliminated. While food, medicines, and other humanitarian goods were technically exempt, the sale of petroleum to gain foreign currency to pay for them was not allowed except under circumstances Iraq regarded as an infringement of sovereignty. The result of this political intransigence by the Saddam Hussein government and our own, was the death of hundreds of thousands of children and vulnerable adults, beyond normal mortality projections.<sup>20</sup>

A September 1996 report by Michael Nahhal, relief coordinator in Iraq for the Middle East Council of Churches, states the following:

The West wants to punish the leaders of Iraq, but the ones bearing all the burden are ordinary people who have no say nor any part in the decision-making of the system under which they are obliged to live. Their suffering is tremendous. Decades of progress in development have been undone, social structures are decaying into primitive configurations . . . . To simply stand aside and bear witness is not sufficient.

The embargo on Iraq has now been eased to permit the sale of a small quantity of petroleum and allow the import of a small portion of the

much needed humanitarian supplies, but the basic problem will remain until the embargo can be eased far more, or fully lifted.

Of growing concern is that the United States is pressing all other countries to adhere to a similar embargo it has imposed unilaterally upon Iran and Libya. Economic embargoes are blunt instruments in trying to force changes in policies or leadership of countries the U.S. does not like. While such sanctions make life more difficult for the whole society, the suffering falls most heavily on poor and vulnerable people, perhaps for decades. That is a moral and economic consequence that cannot be ignored.

#### ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

In many ways, the political success of the Arab-Israeli peace process inaugurated in 1993 will depend upon whether it can bring rapid improvement in the economic life of the Palestinian people of the West Bank and Gaza. For thirty years, Israeli policies in the occupied territories have resulted in limiting economic development among Palestinians. Agriculture has been stifled by land confiscations and by making water for irrigation largely unobtainable by Palestinians. Producers are largely denied the right to sell in Israel, and the movement of Palestinian goods within the West Bank and Gaza is restricted to maintain the area as a captive market for Israeli businesses. Border closures and extended curfews in the West Bank and Gaza have often resulted in the destruction of agricultural crops. Similarly, industrial investment has been largely prohibited for Palestinians and export to foreign markets virtually denied. Deprived of normal work opportunities, tens of thousands of Palestinians became dependent on income as day laborers in Israel. Meanwhile, Israel's costs of occupation were more than covered by taxes imposed. Far more important, its economy benefitted immensely from captured water, captive markets, and cheap labor.

Israel has emerged into the ranks of developed nations with a per capita income of \$16,000 (expected to rise to \$20,000 by the year 2000).<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, some estimates put per capita income of Palestinians well below \$1,800.<sup>22</sup> Israel has made great progress in establishing a highly trained, technological workforce. It has nearly twice as many technicians and scientists per 10,000 population as either the U.S. or Japan.<sup>23</sup> Palestinians worldwide are highly educated, but most of those who have

stayed in the West Bank and Gaza will be in a poor position to compete in an increasingly technological world economy.

The result is that whatever the political outcome of present negotiations, Palestinians begin their new economic life alongside Israel not from zero but from a thirty-year deficit. There is a serious shortage of housing, and much of what exists is in poor condition; physical infrastructure not important to Israel has been neglected; productive investment has hardly been allowed. The Palestinian labor force has grown from 400,000 to 433,000 since 1994, but jobs available have actually diminished because Palestinians allowed to work in Israel have been cut from a peak of 116,000 in 1992 to just 18,000 presently. Estimates of unemployment run between 45 percent and 60 percent.<sup>24</sup>

Unless ordinary Palestinian people begin to sense that life will improve markedly and quickly, no political settlement will bring a secure peace.

#### FOREIGN AID

Foreign assistance has an important but limited role to play in several countries of the Middle East. Aid cannot make up for unfairly structured or incompetently run economies; it cannot permanently compensate for high unemployment, misallocated resources, or the distortions created by unbounded greed. But aid can shorten the waiting time for the benefits of a well-conceived development strategy. That should be the goal of U.S. foreign assistance.

Unfortunately, that has been neither the result nor the intent of U.S. aid to the Middle East. Practically all aid to the region for years has gone to Israel and Egypt—who between them account for over 40 percent of the entire American foreign assistance budget for the whole world.<sup>25</sup> That is far more motivated by strategic and military considerations and by U.S. domestic political realities than by any rational assessment of need or opportunity.

Dramatic increases in the U.S. foreign assistance budget are unlikely in the context of a Congress and administration focused on eliminating the budget deficit. The pressing need in many countries of the Middle East for outside help will probably be met only by reallocating some of the funds now going to Israel and Egypt. Support should certainly be channeled

through individual governments committed to development that affects positively the broad base of the population. But support can also be used to encourage joint projects by two or more countries, thereby creating additional incentives to maintain peace.

#### THE DREAM OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Since the days of Israeli diplomat and Deputy Prime Minister Abba Eban, some have held to the dream of peace nurtured by a shared economy. Even today, some fantasized about the power of a regional economic union that draws upon the technical-scientific skills of Israel, the labor pool of the Palestinians, capital from the Arabian Peninsula, and markets shared by all.

In reality, the region is now less economically integrated than it was thirty years ago. With only 3.6 percent of world trade, just 7 percent of that is among the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and such inter-Arab trade is growing at less than half the rate of world trade generally. That reflects the common deficiencies of the Arab economies that cannot be met by trade among themselves. As the most advanced economy in the region, Israel stands to benefit tremendously from trade access to the larger Middle East. But that will await an Israel-Palestinian peace perceived as reasonable, if not just, by the Arab world. The danger of the present situation is that Israel is in a position virtually to dictate terms. If it chooses to take maximum advantage and leaves Palestinians feeling ravaged and economically hopeless, the rest of the Arab world will take note and have little reason to be more open and accepting of Israel as a regional partner. They may rightly fear that the fate of Palestinians will be theirs as well as disadvantaged interlocutors in establishing trade relationships with an economically strong and militarily powerful Israel, backed unstintingly by the United States.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) Urge the United States government, other governments, the United Nations, international development agencies and financial institutions, and private entities, to cooperate fully in building more productive, sustainable, self-reliant, and socially equitable agricultural systems throughout the Middle East.**

- (2) Call upon the United States government, other governments, and international institutions to seek enlargement of nonpetroleum trade with countries of the Middle East in ways that will encourage sustainable economic development, favors the interests of poor people, and protects workers' rights and well-being.
- (3) Call for a redistribution of a portion of the economic assistance presently going to Israel and Egypt in order to support the peace process. As part of the process of promoting peace in the region, more United States' aid should be made available to the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as to regional development projects that serve to strengthen economic ties between the states of the region, particularly between Israel and its neighboring Arab states and peoples.
- (4) Ask the United States to support efforts to speed up delivery of urgently needed economic development assistance in the West Bank and Gaza.
- (5) Call upon the United States government to support a continued easing of economic sanctions against Iraq in a manner that does not support Iraq's ability to make acts of aggression toward its neighbors.
- (6) Call upon the United Nations to remove all economic sanctions imposed upon Iraq when the United Nations has ascertained that Iraq has complied with the requirements regarding the destruction of weapons and the capacity to produce them.
- (7) Ask the United States government, and other governments, to exercise caution from unilaterally imposing economic sanctions, and urge that, if economic sanctions are undertaken by the international community in an attempt to force Middle Eastern or other governments into making policy changes, care must be taken not to allow the results to put at risk the lives or well-being of the general populace.

## VII CONCERNING WATER



IT IS NO ACCIDENT that the great cultures of the Middle East historically grew where rivers flowed and the desert bloomed. Water, even more than the quality of soil, has defined the nature of life for nations as well as individuals.

Exploding populations and the pressure of economic development are now placing greater stress than ever on water resources throughout the region. Half of the people of the Middle East depend on water that crosses the border with another nation or that comes from desalination. Only Lebanon and Turkey have abundant, natural water. It is not surprising that many fear that future wars in the region may be more about water than about politics or petroleum.

Three river systems unite and divide the core countries of the Middle East. Each generates concerns, if not conflict. Ninety percent of the Arab-speaking people receive their water from non-Arabic regions.<sup>26</sup> Both the Tigris and Euphrates rise in the mountains of Turkey. While drainage within Iraq adds about half of the volume of the Tigris, almost all of the water in the Euphrates is controlled by Turkey, a non-Arab country. Many Arabs fear that Turkey will seek to use its water resources with the same regional indifference as the Persian/Arabian Gulf countries have used their petroleum resources.

Even with no mal-intent, Turkey's development scheme could prove a threat to its downstream neighbors. Ankara has embarked upon a massive irrigation and electric power generation project in the province of Anatolia that may ultimately involve twenty-one dams on the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates. When completed, Syria and Iraq may lose

40 percent to 60 percent of the water they currently receive through the Euphrates. A foretaste was given when the first huge dam was completed; the flow of the Euphrates was cutoff for a month in order to fill the lake created. Furthermore, waters are already increasing in salinity as irrigation water in Turkey is returned to the stream. Thus, the quality of water in both Syria and Iraq is diminishing along with the quantity. That could lead to economic devastation in both downstream countries.

Such threats might well lead to war were it not for the fact that Turkey is so much larger and more powerful militarily. Even so, one might expect Iraq and Syria to respond by giving increased backing to the Kurds in their ongoing struggle within Turkey.

The Nile River basin has also bred regional tension. The river has created and defined Egyptian life, yet virtually all its water comes from Ethiopia, Sudan, and Central Africa. No Egyptian tributaries contribute to its flow. Yet Cairo regards the river as a national treasure, and fears and resists any action that might reduce its flow through Egypt. Ethiopia is too poor to develop a network of dams, and Egypt has prevailed in keeping international funds from doing so.

In 1959, Egypt built the huge Aswan High Dam and agreed that one-quarter of the water would go to Sudan. Such diplomacy has survived political tensions between the two countries, but Sudan has been warned that no interference with the river will be tolerated by the more powerful Egypt.<sup>27</sup> That may be tested if and when Sudan is able to resume work on a major canal project abandoned because of its civil war. The project annually would save billions of cubic meters of water from evaporation in swamps. That would be a major resource savings that could contribute to economic development in Sudan. But such development might also reduce the amount of water headed for Egypt, something Cairo would resist.

Egypt currently uses all the water that flows through it, including tens of millions of cubic meters to which Sudan is entitled by the Aswan agreement, but has not claimed. The Nile still empties a huge volume into the delta, but the water is so saline that it is unsuitable or no longer useful, even for agriculture, which uses 82 percent of the country's water resources.<sup>28</sup> Egypt's population, currently estimated at 59 million,

increases by one million every ten months. Further economic development will likely require still more water.

The Jordan is the third major river system of the Middle East. Tiny by comparison to the Nile and the Euphrates, it has nevertheless been a key factor in the Arab-Israeli struggle, and may be yet more important in reaching a final peace.

In the early 1960s, the Israeli military forced Syria and Jordan to abandon a joint project to divert the waters of the Upper Jordan, and since the 1967 war, by assuming control of the Syrian Golan Heights and the entire West Bank of the Jordan, Israel has been able virtually to dictate regional water policy.

Almost half of Israel's total water supply comes from Arab sources.<sup>29</sup> The largest portion is groundwater from the West Bank tapped by a network of wells within Israel and by Jewish settlers in Palestinian territories. Under occupation, Palestinians have been forbidden to drill new wells or deepen old ones. Little water from the Israeli distribution system has been made available to Palestinians. With water in very short supply, improvements in Palestinian agricultural productivity have been difficult and other forms of economic activity have been curtailed. Israelis consume three to four times as much water per capita as the Palestinians.<sup>30</sup>

The national water carrier system is another key element of Israel's water supply. Runoff from Syria and Lebanon collects in the Sea of Galilee. From there water is diverted further west and south through a system of tubes and canals to major Israeli population centers and farms. The diversion reduces the flow through the Jordan River and thus makes less water available to the country of Jordan. The Jordanian situation is further complicated by irrigation water from northern Israel being dumped back into the river channel, increasing its salinity and reducing its quality.

As the numbers of both Israelis and Palestinians increase, so too do demands on the water supply. If a peace settlement is reached, its durability will depend in no small measure on dramatic economic improvements for Palestinians that cannot occur without increased access to water. But all available water is currently being used.

Numerous technological fixes have been proposed to avoid any reduction in Israeli per capita water availability.

- ❖ Towing icebergs from the Antarctic is dismissed as pure fantasy.
- ❖ A “peace pipeline” carrying water from southeastern Turkey to Israel-Palestine, and perhaps even to countries along the Persian/Arabian Gulf, has been suggested. But no one has explained how to solve the political risk of depending for water upon a traditional enemy or uncertain friend who can turn off the supply.
- ❖ Former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat broached the idea of pumping two billion cubic meters of water per year from the Nile delta. But delta water is too saline even for agricultural use.
- ❖ Others have proposed pumping sea water from the Mediterranean or the Red Sea to a fall line above the Dead Sea, creating a waterfall that could be used to generate electricity that would in turn be used to desalinate the sea water. But most do not view the economics as reasonable.
- ❖ Mass desalination projects of various sorts have been proposed, but thus far the costs are prohibitive.

The one approach immediately at hand that receives little attention is based not on producing more water, but on needing less. This could be accomplished in Israel, and other countries of the region, by adopting policies that would dramatically reduce agricultural subsidies, especially cheap water, and encourage the importation of basic foods, particularly grains, that can be produced far more cheaply in rain-fed climates. It is noteworthy that Israeli scientists have made significant advances in hydroponic and aeroponic (drip and mist) irrigation techniques and in the development of plants that can be irrigated with salt water. These technologies, under peaceful conditions, could be of immense value not only to Israel, but to other Middle Eastern and African countries, and in other parts of the world.

By curtailing its uneconomic, water-intensive, highly subsidized agricultural system, Israel could return a major portion of diverted water

resources to its Arab neighbors and thus enhance the prospects of a lasting peace.

This approach may seem inconsistent with the General Assembly’s long-preferred position of encouraging maximum local and regional food self-sufficiency. When, however, that rests upon the false economies of massive subsidies and the misallocation of such a precious resource as scarce water, other actions are in order. The starting point of moral and theological concern about technical and economic issues is the conviction that human society must be good stewards of God’s gifts; all policy decisions unfold from that premise.

To encourage sustainable development policies in the Middle East that will conserve water, the United States, and the international community in general, must refrain from politically motivated economic and trade sanctions that cause governments in the region to fear entrusting more of their food supply to international trade. Iraq is a case in point. As a country rich in oil and short of productive farmers, it imported the majority of its food. Under the U.S.-led international embargo, it has been reduced to near starvation. Unless the international embargo is lifted enough to allow the sale of sufficient petroleum to buy adequate food, the lesson drawn by other governments in the Middle East will likely be that food self-sufficiency must be maintained even at the cost of irrational uses of water.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Recognizing that water is God’s gift to all creation, and that upon it every living thing depends, the 209th General Assembly (1997) does the following:**

- (1) **Urges all countries of the Middle East to cooperate in seeking regional forums, treaties, and planning mechanisms by which to develop and use water resources in ways that will benefit fairly all countries and peoples linked by particular water systems and technologies.**
- (2) **Urges the countries of the region, and particularly Israel, to consider importing greater quantities of commodity food products,**

including grains, in order to reduce the need for massive agricultural irrigation, thus preserving water for more direct human use and for higher value agricultural production. [The General Assembly recognizes that this recommendation represents a qualified departure from its standing policies on food self-sufficiency.]

- (3) Calls upon the United States government, the World Bank, the United Nations' agencies, and the international community generally, to encourage greater regional water diplomacy throughout the Middle East, and to provide greater technical assistance and financial investment for appropriate water infrastructure in the region.
- (4) Calls upon the international community to refrain from using economic or trade sanctions that penalize or endanger countries that seek to adopt equitable policies for the use of water resources by minimizing agricultural irrigation in favor of appropriate food imports.

## VIII CONCERNING PETROLEUM



THE TWENTIETH CENTURY might well be called "the petroleum century." Modern, industrial society has been based on the increasing need for and availability of relatively inexpensive energy. Oil has been the fuel of choice in that regard. As a consequence, countries surrounding the Persian/Arabian Gulf have assumed a huge role in global economic life. This small area possesses two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves and new discoveries are recorded regularly.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the oil produced is of high quality and is easily extracted.

To no small degree, the boundaries of countries in the region, and the very creation of some and their governments, were determined by Western oil interests following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. Lacking both a coherent political structure and technical petroleum expertise, it is not surprising that Middle East countries were essentially passive partners in the growing oil enterprise during the first half of this century. A cartel of dominant foreign oil companies paid a fixed royalty of only 21 cents per barrel pumped until the 1950s when a fifty-fifty sharing of profits was negotiated for all oil-producing countries. But the Western petroleum companies maintained ownership. As late as 1972, they held a 92 percent equity interest in oil leaving the Middle East; by 1982 the countries owned 93 percent.<sup>32</sup>

### THE RISE IN OIL DEPENDENCY

This rise in Middle East petroleum wealth and power was due not only to the increased sophistication of the countries involved, but to the growing dependency of the industrialized world on Persian Gulf area production. As petroleum deposits in the United States diminished

and production costs rose, Middle East oil became not only more attractive, but more necessary. In 1967, the U.S. imported just 20 percent of its oil, and only half that from the twelve member states of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). By 1991, total oil imports were 46 percent, and 54 percent of that was from OPEC countries.<sup>33</sup>

Europe, of course, has always been more dependent on Middle East petroleum than the United States. Japan counts on the Middle East for most of its oil and, in recent years, the newly developing countries of Asia have become major importers as well. Currently, the Middle East provides 75 percent of the oil available to importing countries.<sup>34</sup>

The rising dependency on Middle East oil became an economic and political opportunity for Persian Gulf countries. In 1971, OPEC acted unilaterally for the first time to raise oil prices from \$3 to \$5.12 per barrel. Immediately afterward, the Arab members of OPEC agreed to cut their production by 5 percent until Israel would withdraw from Arab territories occupied in the 1967 war. Saudi Arabia, responding even more strongly, reduced production by 25 percent and cut off all shipments to the United States.

Because of oil dependency and few supply options, importers had little choice but to pay virtually whatever OPEC asked. Petroleum prices quadrupled by 1973, an event widely credited with precipitating a worldwide recession in 1974–75. This resulted in a sudden, massive shift of funds into the hands of a few Middle East countries. Those with huge oil reserves and small populations established a high-consumption lifestyle based primarily on imports. Desperate to manage their balance of payments, developing countries without oil borrowed heavily to keep their economies afloat, setting off a spiral of indebtedness that has still not been resolved.

Highly industrialized countries, like the United States, also faced balance of payments difficulties. One partial solution was to increase sharply the export of expensive, high-tech aircraft and weapons systems to the Middle East oil exporters.

## SECURING U.S. INTERESTS

The military buildup in the Persian Gulf region was not just a balance-of-payments exigency, however. Because of growing dependency on imported oil, U.S. economic well-being was perceived to be at stake in the Middle East. During the cold war, the United States worried that the economic viability of the West might be compromised by a Soviet Union move on the Persian Gulf. Massive arms sales were justified in the name of those countries having the right and responsibility to defend themselves against the Soviet Union or regional aggressors.

What was being secured, however, was not just the sovereignty rights of Middle East monarchies and dictatorships, but the American way of life. On the eve of the war against Iraq, President George Bush expressed that conviction unmistakably, as follows:

Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom and the freedom of friendly countries around the world would suffer if control of the world's great oil reserves fell into the hands of Saddam Hussein. (August 15, 1990)

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait provided the occasion for the U.S. to do what had long been resisted by Persian Gulf countries—the placement of U.S. troops in the region. The war against Saddam Hussein ended over half a decade ago, yet American soldiers are still on the ground in Saudi Arabia and U.S. warships continue to ply the waters of the Persian Gulf, and larger numbers remain ready as needed in the Indian Ocean beyond.

Thus, in this last decade of the twentieth century, the United States military has become the ultimate guarantor of Western access to Middle East oil. That has prompted critics to note that the true price of oil is not that posted in the market, but rather should include the costs of the permanent military presence assumed by the U.S. taxpayer—estimated at \$50 billion.<sup>35</sup> That would add some \$12.50 to the price of every barrel of Middle East oil—which has fluctuated between \$17.45 and \$28.10 over the past year.<sup>36</sup>

## THE CONSERVATION SOLUTION

If President Bush's assessment is taken seriously, the Persian Gulf War was fought, and the extraordinary military expenditures in the region continue to be paid, to protect "our way of life." Not simply democracy or security are implied, but the American style of living. Other rich countries of the world are able to maintain their comfortable status with about half the per capita energy consumption of the United States. It is striking that few voices are heard in policy circles these days calling for a resolution of the energy dilemma based on reducing energy need. Instead, almost all attention is given to protecting present sources and increasing potential output.

Columnist Thomas L. Friedman put the issues well, as follows:

We responded to the 1973–79 oil crises by raising taxes on gasoline to reduce consumption. Now we are lowering those taxes. We responded to the 1973–79 crises by shrinking the size of automobiles; now we are upsizing them. We responded to the 1973–79 crises by lowering the speed limits; now we are raising them. To put it in numerical terms, before 1979 the U.S. was importing about 45 percent of its oil. After 1979, as conservation really kicked in, oil imports fell to 32 percent by 1985. Since then, imports have steadily crept up, topping 50 percent last year.<sup>37</sup>

## THE POLITICS OF OIL SUPPLY

Such dire warnings have a strange ring when the price of petroleum has held steady in the \$20 per barrel range for over a decade and where new discoveries are made regularly in various parts of the world. Proven reserves stand at an all time high.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Russia may well join other former Soviet Republics in seeking a larger place in the world petroleum market in the attempt to increase hard currency earnings.

Expanded production could, in the medium term, drive world oil prices even lower. That would be a major blow to the oil producers located in the Arabian Peninsula that were slow to see the need to reduce their

ostentatious spending and invest to diversify their unidimensional petroleum economies. Expanded exports from the former Soviet Union will take several years. But Iraq and Iran are both in a position to increase production almost immediately. One does not have to be either a cynic or inclined to conspiracy theories to believe that a fear of a near-term oil glut may partly drive the U.S. government dual containment policy that seeks to isolate and weaken both Iraq and Iran.

Falling prices and cheating on OPEC production agreements throughout the 1980s, along with struggles between Iraq and Kuwait over disputed oil fields, set the stage for the 1990–91 Persian Gulf War. Effectively dividing Iraq's share of OPEC production between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait has eased adjustments both countries must make in atoning for profligate spending over two decades. That protection will be ended if and when Iraq resumes full petroleum export or Iran goes into full production.

Increased financial hard times in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates would be both economic and political bad news for the United States. Austerity budgets would likely mean reduced weapons imports from U.S. producers already hurting from cuts in U.S. military procurement programs. There is also the fear that any reduction in social spending by the Arabian Peninsula governments will create fertile ground for Islamic militants who regard Western influence as decadence and a U.S. military presence in the land of Mecca and Medina as a living heresy. In short, American policy makers fear another Iran.

Some energy experts<sup>39</sup> fear that if oil prices remain low, there will be little incentive to invest in developing the new oil fields that will be necessary to supply future demand associated with rapid economic expansion in Asia, particularly in China, which has little petroleum of its own. Thus, low prices today will mean short supplies and runaway prices tomorrow.

United States' policy is thus presented with a dilemma. Limited oil production and higher prices may facilitate environmental, investment, and some foreign policy goals. If the role of Iran and Iraq in the petroleum market can be minimized for some time, the indebted sheikdoms will be better able to restructure their budgets and economies while heaping minimal sacrifices on the poor. On the other hand, lower oil prices



would reduce U.S. balance-of-payments pressures and make easier the achievement of domestic economic goals. The moral dilemma is whether our government will seek to preserve Americans and U.S. allies from painful economic adjustments by creating policies that shift the burden of sacrifice to the people of Iraq and Iran—countries our government would like to see diminished in power and influence.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) Call upon the people and government of the United States to adopt practices and policies that will reduce significantly the American demand for petroleum so as to conserve this nonrenewable resource, protect the environment, reduce balance of payments pressures, and lower energy costs for developing countries.
- (2) Call upon the government of the United States to reduce the nation's dependence on imports of oil from the Middle East as a necessary step in reducing the American military presence and the promotion of weapons sales in the region.
- (3) Call upon governments of oil-producing countries of the Middle East to increase their economic assistance to the development of other countries in the region.

## IX CONCERNING THE ENVIRONMENT



### A FRAMEWORK OF UNDERSTANDING AND ACTION

IN THE FOREWORD to the 1987 report to the United Nations by the World Commission on Environment and Development (the so-called Brundtland Commission), it was noted: "Perhaps our most urgent task today is to persuade nations of the need to return to multilateralism."<sup>40</sup>

Ecological dilemmas of today's world do not respect national boundaries. Developing countries increasingly realize that concern about the environment is not a luxury of the rich, but a constraint upon all.

The environmental concerns of Middle Eastern countries are not different from our own in most respects. Trying to provide adequately for a whole population, while dealing with the pollution of air, water, and soil that accompanies "modernization," is a challenge that confronts both the United States and the Middle Eastern countries.

### POPULATION GROWTH

As in much of the developing world, population in the Middle East continues to grow at a rate that will challenge the resourcefulness of governments and perhaps the carrying capacity of the regional eco-structure. Some countries in the region have made significant strides in reducing their rate of population growth. Among them are the two largest, Egypt and Iran at 1.9 percent and 2.1 percent respectively. Even so, their population will double in less than thirty years. Other countries in the region are growing much more rapidly. Syria, Jordan, and Iraq, for example, are increasing at 3 percent or more per year. Even more ominous is that almost half their populations are under fifteen years of age. Clearly, unless

there is a significant change in the fertility rate, such countries will face even more difficult economic and ecological dilemmas in the future.

It is easy, of course, to say that they need to institute vigorous birth-control programs. That is a truism that does not resolve the immediate problem, however. Even if undertaken, it will not show much result for almost a generation.

Perhaps more discouraging to policy formation is the suspicion many harbor that population control is an alternative to a fairer sharing of resources. As one Arab woman expressed it, "Why is it easier to insert Norplant in a woman's arm than to tell a man in Mohandissin not to drive his Mercedes?"<sup>41</sup>

The present environmental crisis is about more than numbers of people. It is about rising demand placing great stress on the eco-structure. Rapidly growing populations in the Middle East and elsewhere contribute greatly to that stress; so, too, does the seemingly unquenchable demand for goods by those with funds to spare, whether they are the wealthy of Cairo and Riyadh or the American middle class.

Still, the press of population darkens the future of much of the Middle East. Egypt is illustrative. Two decades ago, Egypt was self-sufficient in food. Now, population growth and land mismanagement have combined in a way that the country can produce scarcely half its grain. Buying abroad is a possibility, but that depends upon the health of the economy—not a happy outlook. By the year 2000, Egypt will have to create 600,000 new jobs each year just to stay up with additions to the labor force. Yet the average from 1976–86 was just 220,000.<sup>42</sup> Other countries in the region face similar challenges in coping with rapidly growing populations and the demand placed upon resources.

#### FRESH WATER SHORTAGE; SEA FLOODING

The political issues of water in the Middle East are discussed elsewhere in this background paper. The ecological dilemmas are perhaps even greater and more intractable.

Most of the Middle East is arid, but massive flooding may be on the horizon. If theories about global warming prove correct and seas rise by

a meter or more over the next forty years, major population centers from Alexandria and Port Said to Beirut may be at risk. Because of the gradual character of this type of flooding, lives will be spared but not property. The economic costs of replacement and relocation will add greatly to an already bleak economic picture.

Furthermore, sea flooding also threatens the loss of fertile land in the Nile River delta, the source of the greatest agricultural production in Egypt.<sup>43</sup> Farming may also be destroyed even where land is spared as present fresh water channels become brackish further upstream complicating, if not ending, irrigation in those areas, without which food production will be virtually impossible.

Life along the Mediterranean Sea is threatened by more than the greenhouse effect. Some experts predict that with its narrow connection to the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean may become a wholly dead sea in the next century. While the greater problems of pollution may come from Europe, Middle Eastern countries contribute as well. A seven-mile section along the shore near Beirut has nine major sewage pipes that dump an estimated six million tons of organic wastes into the sea—seven or eight times the concentration in any other area of similar size. Local health effects are already notable.<sup>44</sup>

There are other more typical threats to the interplay of water and land throughout the region. Lebanon's Amiq swamp, a private property in the Beqaa valley, is being drained to create agricultural land. Besides extinguishing the habitat of hundreds of local water plants and animals, the swamp has been a major resting stop in the annual migration of two billion birds as they travel from parts of Eurasia to Africa.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the region, from the Nile delta to Palestinian territories along the lower Jordan River, to sections of Iraq, irrigation is increasing the salinity of water to such a level as to make it of marginal utility even for agriculture.

Water shortages, of course, affect not only farming and food production, but urban life as well. Jordan, during dry months, must truck vast amounts of fresh water to the city of Amman because overuse has lowered the water table and because the city must accommodate a huge Palestinian refugee population.

In Egypt, the Aswan Dam produces 40 percent of the nation's electricity. Droughts in Central Africa and increased upstream use have at times reduced the flow of the Nile sufficiently to cause a 20 percent reduction in the Aswan power generation capability.<sup>46</sup> Such loss threatens both the comforts of ordinary life and the economic output of the nation. To the extent that hydroelectric power losses must be replaced by imported petroleum, the country will be less able to afford equally needed imports of food.

#### LAND CRISES

Good soil is in short supply in most of the Middle East and attempts to make marginal lands agriculturally productive have added greater stress to the water dilemma. In the symbiotic relationship of land and water in arid regions, the useful soils of today in some places are becoming the deserts of tomorrow. Overuse of aquifers has not only lowered the water table in many areas, but sometimes drawn in seawater making wells too saline even for agricultural use. That has led, in turn, to an increase in the desertification of previously useful soils. This has been particularly noticeable in some areas along the Nile, as well as in Gaza and Israel. Egypt is losing an estimated 120 square kilometers of agricultural land per year to the desert.<sup>47</sup> Add to that the amount of agricultural land lost to brick, concrete, and asphalt as towns and cities expand with an ever-growing population, and new housing developments and roads continue to be built.

Lebanon is one of the few countries in the region with ample water resources. But even there, the cutting of mountainside forest cover is leading to increased problems of erosion and land loss.

The combination of factors that makes land less habitable, or at least less productive, has the potential for creating huge numbers of environmental refugees—particularly in Egypt. Displaced by ecological changes or resulting economic circumstances, such persons can no longer live in the area of their birth and where their ancestors lived before them. While most do not migrate to other countries, they seek another way of life in their own country, frequently adding to the press of massive urban populations.

#### AIR POLLUTION

In most of the Middle East, air pollution is highly associated with urban concentrations. As in most other places, the automobile is the chief culprit. The traffic congestion of Cairo and Tehran is legendary, as is the resulting smog that makes breathing a hazard to health.

Beirut is becoming nearly as bad. But there the assault on the atmosphere by a million motor vehicles is perhaps overshadowed by that of two million home, gasoline-powered generators adopted as necessities during the sixteen-year civil war that destroyed much of the electrical infrastructure. The generators released tons of lead compounds, carbon dioxide, and other harmful gases into the air for half a generation. That damage is only now being repaired as the city rebuilds from the war.

Other cities throughout the region face similar environmental impact from individual citizens attempting to cope with inadequate public services.

The ecological dilemmas faced by peoples throughout the Middle East are not subject to the solutions of individuals or families alone. Nor will they be resolved, in many cases, even by individual governments. A restored and protected environment will require regional cooperation as a minimum and greater international strategy, finance, and collaboration on many issues.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**Noting that the varied environmental concerns within the Middle East are not merely national or regional issues but specific manifestations of global realities and problems, and acknowledging that national and regional solutions must be encouraged and supported—politically, technologically, and financially—by the larger international community, the 209th General Assembly (1997), therefore, calls upon the United Nations and its member states to exercise their influence in providing the support necessary for assisting Middle Eastern countries in their efforts to protect and preserve the environment.**

# X CONCERNING THE KURDS



THE HISTORY OF THE KURDS is webbed with massive human suffering and injustices. They continue to struggle through persecutions and exterminations. The fabric of their existence is one of broken promises, alliances, and betrayals by both enemies and by allies as well as by their own people. Kurds continue to be among the most economically poor and underdeveloped people in the Middle East. They are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, behind Arabs, Persians, and Turks, numbering approximately twenty to twenty-five million. The neighboring countries to Kurdistan are where we find the Kurdish populations. Before the Persian Gulf War, approximately eight million Kurds lived in Iran and approximately four million in Iraq. In Turkey, there are eight to ten million Kurds, which makes them the second largest ethnic group in Turkey. About one million resided in Syria.

Kurdistan has no official borders and is comparable to the size of France. Its geography is a rugged mountainous region wealthy in oil and water stretching from Zagros mountains in Iran, through part of northeast Iraq, northern Syria, and southeast Turkey. Beginning in the seventh century, the people inhabiting this region were called Kurds. In much of their history, they have relied on the mountains to isolate and protect themselves from the outside world.<sup>48</sup>

During the 1980s, the Kurds received cruel treatment in both Iran and Iraq. The most devastating actions against the Kurds came in 1987–88 by the Iraqi military in response to the Kurdish coalition to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Kurdish leaders wanted to bring an end to the Iran-Iraq War and gain national independence for their people. The Kurds became the target of Hussein's unrelenting anger and need for vengeance.

More than 180,000 Kurds were massacred and Hussein's military destroyed 4,000 of the 5,000 villages during his campaign of brutal retaliation. Another result of this campaign was the destruction of their agricultural resources, which has had a harsh and long-reaching impact upon their economy. It was not until these tragedies that the international community become cognizant of the Kurds and their struggle for autonomy.

## RECENT HISTORY: 1990S

The Persian Gulf War brought suffering and opportunity to the Kurds. With the defeat of Saddam Hussein in early 1991, Iraqi Kurdish leaders rebelled and joined forces to overthrow Hussein.

With confidence and high hopes to achieve autonomy and stability, the Kurds were eradicated quickly when Hussein's army began recapturing cities and the countryside. In a mass exodus, more than two million Kurds fled for their lives to Iran. Hundreds fled to the Turkish border to escape Hussein's revenge. With the cease-fire in the Persian Gulf War and the creation of "Safe Haven" areas for the Kurds, the Iraqi government allowed villagers to return and rebuild their villages. For two short years, the two major Kurdish political parties (the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)) unified for the benefit of all Kurds. These united parties accomplished three significant objectives: they made possible the first democratic election of a Kurdish parliament; they defined the federal relationship between Iraq Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq putting it into law; and they devised a strategy to put new life into the economy, including the social services in the region.

At the end of 1993 and at the beginning of 1995, two major confrontations erupted into civil war. The KDP controlled one-third of Iraqi Kurdistan and the PUK controlled the other two-thirds, which included major cities. Both parties have slaughtered, tortured, and imprisoned their fellow Kurdsmen, grossly violating basic human rights of their citizens. What their enemies have done unto them, they in turn have done unto their own people repeatedly and without any prosecution for their crimes.

A further crisis occurred in September 1995 when the term of the newly elected democratic parliament was to terminate. Through local, regional, and international mediation, the two major parties were able to agree

to extend the term of the parliament for one year. Both parties continue to abuse the human rights of the Kurdish people and work against unification and autonomy. Each party has its own system of punishment, border customs, and checkpoints. Fear of a third civil war surfaced in 1996. Rivalry and lust for power and authority overshadow the suffering and the basic needs of the Kurdish people. Recently, it was discovered that both parties are getting weaponry from Saddam Hussein. Until the leaders of the two parties are able to accept compromise and stop playing the enemy games, the Kurds will not gain the political, economic, and social strength to win their long desire for autonomy and recognition by the international community.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) Urge the United States government to encourage the leaders of the two major Kurdish political parties, Kurdistan Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, to work cooperatively and justly for the good of all Kurds and to cease from their abuse of the human rights of the Kurdish people.
- (2) Encourage the United States government, the United Nations and concerned nongovernmental organizations, ecumenical bodies, and interfaith agencies to consult with Kurdish leaders to identify ways in which the international community can assist in their economic, political, and social recovery.
- (3) Appeal to the United States government to use its influence with the government of Turkey to get Turkey's government to respect the inalienable human rights of the Kurds and to cease its hard-line treatment of the Kurds who live in, or flee to, the southeast of Turkey.
- (4) Appeal to the United States government to communicate with the government of Iraq its concern for the inalienable human rights of the Kurds who live in Iraq but may be in opposition to the government, and to urge Iraq's government to cease its harsh treatment of the Kurds.

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