

# MennoLetter from Jerusalem

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*A Middle East View by Mennonite Church Liaison,  
Glenn Edward Witmer*

***“The Christian Zionist program provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism, and militarism.”***

—SABEEL conference release

***“In the choice between those who respect Judaism and are critical of Jews versus those who love Jews to bits but despise Judaism, I take my chances with the former.”***

—Dow Marmur, Rabbi Emeritus of Holy Blossom Temple, Toronto

***“Israel’s legitimate, and serious, security concerns will not be served by hindering the emergency relief work of the United Nations.”***

—Peter Hansen, UNRWA Commissioner-General

## ~MY VOICE...

***“We need Christians who can build bridges...standing with both sides!”*** —Fr. Elias Chacour

## ***Don’t Be Just One More Enemy***

We were standing last Friday in Fr. [Abuna]Elias Chacour’s unfinished Church of the Beatitudes in Ibillin, his new project beside the Mar Elias Institutions [MEI] that have been growing so rapidly, now with some 1300 students. Along with 28 members of the *MennoJerusalem Study Tour*, representing eleven Ontario congregations, I stared at the beautiful mural on the auditorium wall, painted by Diane Roe of the Christian Peacemakers Team in Hebron: Palestinians and Israelis together, Jews and Muslims alongside Christians in shared work activities, with representations of modern-day martyrs to the cause of peace-making in the Middle East—Rachel Corrie, crushed to death under a bulldozer trying to prevent it from demolishing a Palestinian home; George Weber, who lost his life during a CPT visit to Iraq; a young Palestinian peace demonstrator who was grabbed and summarily shot by Israeli soldiers; an Israeli mother who lost her only daughter to a suicide bomber, and now works for reconciliation between the cultures...

It was a profound moment that left us silent in contemplation. MEI volunteer Marie Loller was explaining more of the painting details when a short man appeared in the doorway and made his way toward us—Abuna Chacour himself! He had just arrived from the airport, and came to greet us briefly. But in that short exchange, on learning that we had spent time in Jewish homes and synagogues, staying with Palestinian families and visiting mosques, he struck the keynote: “When you come here and learn about the problems we have, don’t take sides like most do. If you are passionately concerned about the plight of the Israelis who suffer from the fear of attacks, that’s good. They need our support. If you are determined to do something for the exploited and downtrodden Palestinians, excellent. More help is needed. But don’t take one side, or you will be just one more enemy to the other. We need Christians who build bridges. Only striving for reconciliation can help us—stand with *both* sides!” It’s daring. It’s tough. It’s Matthew 5:9! —GEW

## ~ OTHER VOICES...

BY Gila Svirsky

*“Don’t shoot, we’re not armed, this is a nonviolent demonstration.”*

### *Women Protest Separation Barrier*

*Gila sent the following message received from the director of **Bat Shalom**, a women’s peace organization that forms the Israeli side of **The Jerusalem Link** (the Palestinian side is **The Jerusalem Center for Women**). It describes the violent assault on a non-violent march of Palestinian, Israeli, and international women who were in the town of Biddu in the Occupied West Bank, protesting the construction of the Israeli separation barrier. The barrier has cut off thousands of Palestinians from their fields, markets, natural resources, and services.*

“We were about 60 women, only women: roughly one-third each being Israelis, Palestinians, and internationals. We gathered at Biddu to protest the construction of the wall in this village. It was a quiet march, with women carrying signs and walking toward the area where soldiers were guarding the construction of the fence. At a distance of about 10 meters from them, we stopped walking because the soldiers turned to point their rifles directly at us. I called out to them in Hebrew, ‘Don’t shoot, we’re not armed, this is a nonviolent demonstration.’ Suddenly there was an onslaught of tear gas and stun-grenades falling all around us, completely out of proportion to the quiet, non-provocative nature of our action. The grenades fell at our feet and we were choking, unable to breathe. Most dispersed and ran back. Soldiers charged toward us and fell upon the women, grabbing some whom they arrested. By then there was no demonstration at all, nothing to disperse.

“*Most of the women had run back, trying to recover from the tear gas*, but I stayed because I wanted to talk to the soldiers to prevent the arrest of the four women. Suddenly, out of nowhere, four horses charged, with border police mounted on them. I started to run away, but one of them ridden by a young woman in uniform caught up with me and she struck me on my head with her billyclub. I fell, and then a second horse charged toward me and I felt more blows on my head and back. There was no provocation whatsoever at any point while this was happening.”

Gila added her own evaluation: “Israeli soldiers have made brutality a way of life against Palestinians, then they turned their weapons and death upon international peace activists, and now they are even brutalizing Israelis who express disapproval of their ways. Nonviolence is no longer protection against the brutality of the military, regardless of whether you are Israeli or Palestinian or international. No one should be assaulted for peacefully demonstrating, and yet that has become the norm. Today, all demonstrations that take place in the territories—whether by Palestinians or Israelis, women or men, nonviolent or violent—are treated to the same brutal behavior of guns, stun grenades, and clubs. And no one investigates the incidents in a serious, unbiased manner, meaning that the soldiers learn that they can be cruel with impunity.

“What has happened to us? The occupation has corrupted the soul of Israel. A situation of *Ein din v’ein dayan*: ‘No law, and no one standing in judgment.’ There is anarchy in the soul of Israel today, and it won’t be gone until we uproot the occupation from our land and from our hearts.”

—Gila Svirsky is an Israeli peace campaigner from Jerusalem. She is a founding member of the **Coalition of Women for a Just Peace**, a grouping of eight Israeli and Palestinian women’s peace organizations, and she is a board member of the Israeli human rights organization **B’Tselem**.

For more information: <http://www.coalitionofwomen4peace.org>

**“We reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders with extremist elements in the governments of Israel and the United States.”**

## ***Challenging Christian Zionism***

*Over 600 participants from more than 30 countries participated in the Fifth International Conference of the Sabeel Ecumenical Palestinian Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem last month. They confronted the modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism. This movement, with its elevation of modern political Zionism, provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism, and militarism.*

Christian Zionism is a modern theological and political movement that embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism, thereby becoming detrimental to a just peace within Palestine and Israel. The Christian Zionist program provides a worldview where the Gospel is identified with the ideology of empire, colonialism, and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ’s love and justice today. We also repudiate the more insidious form of Christian Zionism pervasive in some churches that remains silent in the face of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Therefore, we categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as a false teaching that undermines the biblical message of love, mercy, and justice.

We reject the alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organizations with extremist elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently seeking to impose their unilateral preemptive strategies and militaristic rule over others, including Palestine and Iraq. As a result of the April 14 Bush-Sharon memorandum of understanding, the crisis in Israel and Palestine has moved into a new phase of oppression of the Palestinian people. This will inevitably lead to unending cycles of violence and counter violence that are already spreading throughout the Middle East. We reject the heretical teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these extremist policies as they advance a form of racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption, and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ.

***Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon*** we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from ideologies of militarism and occupation and instead to pursue the healing of the world. We call upon Christians in churches on every continent to remember the suffering of the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are victims of policies of occupation and militarism. These policies are reviving a system of apartheid that is turning Palestinian cities, towns and villages into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusively Jewish colonies. The recent construction of the Israeli wall on Palestinian land precludes a viable Palestinian state.

We call upon people of good will everywhere to reject the theology of Christian Zionism and all parallel religious and ideological fundamentalisms that privilege particular people at the expense of others. With renewed urgency we warn that the theology of Christian Zionism is leading to the moral justification of empire, colonization, apartheid, and oppression. God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security, or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently, but non-violently.

SABEEL’s vision embraces two sovereign states, Palestine and Israel, which will enter into confederation or even a federation, possibly with other neighboring countries, where Jerusalem becomes the federal capital. Indeed, the ideal and best solution has always been to envisage ultimately a bi-national state in Palestine-Israel where people are free and equal, living under a constitutional democracy that protects and guarantees all their rights, responsibilities, and duties without racism or discrimination—**one** state for **two** nations and **three** religions.

—SABEEL release

BY Charmaine Stanley

***“The homelessness and trauma that result from housing demolitions are in themselves enough reason for Caterpillar to be concerned.”***

## ***Caterpillar Bulldozers Crash into Legal Quagmire***

Earlier this year, a message was sent out that seems to have originated with *Gush Shalom*, an Israeli peace group. It encouraged concerned individuals to write to the Caterpillar Company of Peoria, Illinois, demanding it take action concerning the use of its D9 bulldozers to demolish Palestinian homes. This raises interesting questions about the responsibilities of corporations in conflict zones. After all, the sale of bulldozers to any government would not ordinarily raise eyebrows. Unlike tanks or bombs, a bulldozer seems a relatively innocuous, if powerful, machine which might be used for any number of productive civilian purposes. In Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, however, these machines have been used to carry out housing demolitions [*now almost 10,000 homes—ed.*] that achieve Israeli strategic and demographic objectives while violating the human rights of Palestinians and further eroding the peace process.

***The demolitions, which can occur with as little as twenty-four hours notice***, are officially justified by Israel based on Palestinian failures to obtain necessary building permits. The Israeli government, however, has made permits extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain despite the need created by a growing Arab population. In practice, housing demolitions are a convenient means of ‘persuading’ Palestinians to move away from areas where Israel wishes to consolidate its own presence. This has obvious implications for the borders of a future Palestinians state. The rationale behind the demolitions was eventually expanded to include ‘collective punishment’ of families of suicide bombers, even when these have not been guilty of any crime themselves.

More recently, during incursions into Palestinian areas, the Israeli military caused disproportionate destruction of civilian infrastructure, including housing, according to a *Human Rights Watch* report. Many civilians were unaware of what was about to happen, until the bulldozers began to demolish their houses. One man, paralyzed and unable to flee his home, was crushed to death inside when the Israeli military refused to grant his family the time to remove him.

***The homelessness and trauma that result from housing demolitions*** are in themselves enough reason for Caterpillar to be concerned. It also seems reasonable to assume that the implications for the boundaries of a future Palestinian state, not to mention the mistrust and resentment generated by such abuses, diminish prospects for peace. The demolitions are also illegal under both customary international law, binding on all states, and the Fourth Geneva Convention, signed and ratified by Israel.

Could Caterpillar be implicated legally in these abuses? In a background paper for last year’s Global Compact dialogue on the role of corporations in conflict zones, Andrew Clapham and Scott Jerbi address an issue they argue is often ignored in the business and human rights literature: how to distinguish different forms of complicity in human rights abuses. Based on their review of international criminal law, Clapham and Jerbi find three categories: direct, indirect, and silent complicity. Direct complicity is a violation of international law where ‘intentional participation’ exists. This means that the accomplice must have been aware of the participation, and have consciously have decided to participate, with the participation ultimately having contributed to the commission of the offence.

It is unnecessary to prove that the accused *desired* that the offence be committed, or intended any harm, only that the harmful effects were foreseeable. Clapham and Jerbi argue that this legal standard, which has already been applied to individuals, could also be applied to corporations. Indirect or beneficial complicity is likely to be applied when a corporation knowingly benefits from human rights abuses. Clapham and Jerbi refer specifically to abuses that occur in the course

of a company's operations, for example, when repressive measures are used in guarding the company's facilities. Finally, silent complicity refers to a company's failure to raise human rights violations with the appropriate authorities and to exercise what influence it has towards preventing them. This, they suggest, is not a legal obligation, strictly speaking, but is increasingly being seen as a moral and ethical responsibility.

*Violations of the rights of Palestinians are not isolated* or unexpected 'excesses' by the Israeli military, but the foreseeable outcome of an established Israeli policy. While Caterpillar likely did not realize to what use its D9 bulldozers would be put when it began supplying them to the Israeli government, the issue has since been brought to its attention and now it consciously continues to provide this equipment. Is the sale of bulldozers enough to meet a legal standard of contributing to the commission of the abuses, i.e., direct complicity? If it turns out that corporations can be held legally responsible for indirect complicity, is Caterpillar—which does not benefit from the demolitions per se, but does profit from the sale of its equipment—indirectly complicit in human rights abuses?

***“We do not and cannot base sales on a customer's intended use for our product. Caterpillar is a global company that provides products and services to companies and governments throughout the world.”***

Corporations that contribute to human rights violations today should be aware that, like those companies that aided and abetted the Nazi regime, they may one day find themselves on the wrong side of international law. If that day comes, the *Statute of Rome*, which will establish the International Criminal Court on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004, will also allow for the prosecution of managers and employees of companies that have facilitated, supported, or encouraged crimes under its jurisdiction, according to the International Centre for Human Rights & Democratic Development.

How has Caterpillar responded to the D9 controversy? According to official spokesperson Benjamin Cordani: “We do not and cannot base sales on a customer's intended use for our product. Caterpillar is a global company that provides products and services to companies and governments throughout the world. We follow the US government's direction on international sales and have a process in place to ensure we follow all laws and guidelines.”

Sorry, that just doesn't cut it. Earlier I noted Clapham and Jerbi's argument that silence in the face of human rights violations, while not strictly illegal, raises moral and ethical questions. Similarly, beyond the letter of the law and the direction of its government, Caterpillar needs to act on this issue. It would be naïve to expect the US government—or any government—to be an effective moral compass. This is a reality of the imperfect world in which we live. It does not release us from our own responsibilities as global citizens, corporate or otherwise. This is all the more relevant in an age when, according to a UN estimate, fifty of the world's 100 greatest powers are multinational corporations.

Globalization has brought corporations new opportunities and great influence. With power, however, comes responsibility. Corporations have an obligation to conduct their business in an ethical manner.

—Charmaine Stanley, a resident of Toronto, is an intern at the Canadian Institute of International Affairs: [cstanley@shoutmonthly.com](mailto:cstanley@shoutmonthly.com)

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***“The extent to which any one of the many criminals was close to or remote from the actual killer of the victim means nothing, as far as the measure of responsibility is concerned. On the contrary, in general the degree of responsibility increases as we draw further away from the man who uses the fatal instrument with his own hands.”***

—The Israeli Supreme Court, in sentencing Nazi war criminal, Adolf Eichmann

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BY Rabbi Dow Marmor

*“The moment we ignore their rejection of Judaism for the sake of short-term gains for Jews, we fall into the trap of mutual cynical exploitation.”*

## *Christians Who Love Jews & Hate Judaism*

Jewish-Christian dialogue poses problems for Jewish participants. Jews who are religiously liberal may have much in common with their Christian counterparts, but liberal Christians are often hostile to Israel. They perceive Palestinians as the underdog and Israel as the aggressor. As good Christians, they say they are on the side of the underdog. But even when they seem to respect Judaism, they appear to be less enamored by Jews, particularly Israelis. Last summer's General Council of the United Church of Canada is a case in point. At the same time as the council passed one of the most liberal and farsighted documents about its attitude to Judaism, it also debated several resolutions and petitions that advocated hostile measures against Israel. At times, it is difficult not to see such attacks as expressions of anti-Semitism.

By contrast, Christian evangelicals affirm their unconditional support for the State of Israel and the Jewish people. But their theology often looks forward to the end of days when all Jews, finally reunited in their own land, will be ready to embrace Christ in anticipation of his second coming. That is why some openly support *Jews for Jesus*. Though not all evangelicals are equally firm, and definitely not equally explicit, few would deny this basic theological tenet. But many insist that it is not biblical prophecy (theology) that motivates them, but biblical promises they see fulfilled before their very eyes (politics). It is the miracle of contemporary Israel rather than the aspirations of an eschatological Israel that moves them to support us.

*Many Jews in Israel and elsewhere are prone to turn a blind eye to the theology* in favor of political advantages. They warmly embrace the evangelicals and bask in their expressions of solidarity, their financial contributions to Israeli causes and their staunch support of the current Israeli government. Christian evangelicals have become the darlings of Jewish right-wingers all over the world. Not to appear ungrateful, even liberals are reluctant to rebuff such warm expressions of Christian love and loyalty. But rebuff we should, all expediency notwithstanding. As I once heard the Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer put it, “Evangelicals love Jews and hate Judaism.” The moment we ignore their rejection of Judaism for the sake of short-term gains for Jews, we fall into the trap of mutual cynical exploitation.

As painful as I find it at times to deal with liberal Christians, I would rather persevere and argue with them than find myself the object of overt or covert Christian missionary activity masquerading as love. In the choice between those who respect Judaism and are critical of Jews versus those who love Jews to bits but despise Judaism, I take my chances with the former.

*—Dow Marmor is Rabbi Emeritus of Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, and a former professor at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology.*

### *Thou Shalt Not Smoke!*

Rabbi Yehezkel Ishayek of Tel Aviv has declared that smoking is as much a sin as eating a ham sandwich! He contends that smoking (or in any way dealing in tobacco) is as forbidden by Jewish law as eating pork. In fact, he declares that it is even more so, since a person's smoking can physically harm and even kill other people, which eating a ham sandwich does not. Ishayek became interested in tobacco and its dangers when the health minister established a public committee to recommend ways to reduce the widespread habit in Israel. The public body was established at the recommendation of High Court of Justice officials involved in the suit by the Israel Medical Association to declare tobacco a ‘dangerous drug.’

*—Jerusalem Post*

*“It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”*

—Robert F. Kennedy

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## ***International Outcry Has Impact!***

### ***UNRWA Recommences Emergency Food Distributions in the Gaza Strip***

Last month UNRWA’s emergency food program [*The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees*] was suspended following restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities at the sole commercial entry point for Gaza. Those restrictions prevented UNRWA from transporting empty freight containers out of Gaza, causing the Agency a bottleneck that prevented 11,000 tons of food from entering from the Israeli port of Ashdod and costing UNRWA around \$130,000 in fees. Israel has now eased the restrictions causing this problem, and UNRWA is now able to deliver food to the 600,000 refugees in Gaza that it supports. It is evident that this was helped by the great international outcry over the issue.

For most of the last two weeks, the Israeli authorities have operated workable arrangements, as is required under international humanitarian law, at the Gaza entry point. These have permitted the Agency to bring sufficient amounts of humanitarian aid into the Strip. The Agency now has enough food in Gaza to provide for the needs of the refugees for the next 30 days. However, the future of the emergency food assistance program remains in doubt because the Israeli authorities are now insisting that holes must be drilled in the two-inch wall cavities of containers leaving Gaza so that they can be searched by mini-camera. The containers are not the property of UNRWA and such procedures will add to the costs and the delays in providing food to the needy.

UNRWA delivers around 250 tons of food aid per day to the refugees in Gaza as part of a wider program of emergency operations. These operations are designed to alleviate the worst of the economic hardship felt by the refugees since the start of the strife in the West Bank and Gaza in September 2000. Around two-thirds of the population of the Gaza Strip, 80 per cent of whom are refugees, are now living below the poverty line and are increasingly dependent on international humanitarian assistance.

UNRWA is not alone in facing chronic obstacles to the flow of humanitarian assistance. These have been experienced by all UN agencies operating in the West Bank and Gaza, whose Agency heads recently called on the Government of Israel—without success—to loosen the restrictions currently in force in Gaza. UNRWA Commissioner-General Peter Hansen said, “The suspension of UNRWA’s emergency food aid in the Gaza Strip will further distress communities already struggling to cope with unrelieved economic hardship and malnutrition. If the restrictions in Gaza continue, I fear we could see real hunger emerge for the first time in two generations. Israel’s legitimate, and serious, security concerns will not be served by hindering the emergency relief work of the United Nations.”

—from a release by Jewish Peace News

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