

# Menno *Letter from Jerusalem*

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



*“The destruction of homes must stop because it is inhuman, un-Jewish,  
and causes us great harm around the world,”*

—Israeli Justice Minister

*“The Knesset should...pass a law that would recognize the right of [Israeli] youth  
to refuse army service on conscientious grounds.”*

—Lily Galili

*“What good is it... if you say you have faith but do not have works?  
...Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.”*

—James 2:14-18

~ *MY VOICE* ...

## *Words, Words, Words...*

*“In the end we’ll be kicked out of the UN, we’ll be put on trial in The Hague,  
and no one will want to have anything to do with us. It’s simply unreasonable to pick up the  
paper and read about plans to destroy 2,000-3,000 homes...”*

The reactions from around the world were scathing: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan condemned the Israeli attacks on Rafah, stating that Israel, “as the occupying power...must cease such acts of collective punishment immediately, and...refrain from further grave violations of international law”; European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana said that, “what is taking place now in Gaza is something that we have to condemn and to condemn very strongly.” Even Israel’s own Justice Minister Yosef Lapid raised some blood pressures at a cabinet meeting with harsh words toward his government by comparing TV images of an old Palestinian woman searching through her leveled home with memories of his grandmother during the Holocaust.

“The destruction of homes must stop because it is inhuman, un-Jewish, and causes us great harm around the world,” Lapid declared. “In the end we’ll be kicked out of the UN, we’ll be put on trial in The Hague, and no one will want to have anything to do with us. It’s simply unreasonable to pick up the paper and read about plans to destroy 2,000-3,000 homes in order to widen the Philadelphia [Gaza] route. ...after the first 100 homes the world will stop us.”

But what bothered me even more in the reported flouting of law and human rights, was the subsequent paragraph in the news account:

*“However none of these statements has had any impact on Israel, because Israel knows that it  
can act with impunity and has the full backing of the US government. For years, Israel has been  
able to flout UN Security Council Resolutions and the Geneva Conventions without any real*

*consequences. The result is escalating, unrestrained violence. Israel is now even brazen enough to announce its war crimes in advance, knowing full well that international action will be limited to a few statements.”*

*There’s the real crime!* Everybody talks...very few act! International reaction is nothing but words, words, words! And worse yet are the churches and religious institutions who won’t even speak up...a real case of silence giving consent!

During our recently completed two-week Study Tour of the Holy Land with the Eastern Mennonite University Alumni and Friends, headed by Calvin and Marie Shenk of Virginia, a frequent question I heard posed by members listening to Israelis and Palestinians tell their stories was, “What can we do? We feel so helpless!” Invariably the answer came back to us: “Tell the story back home. Let others know what is going on. Spread the word and get others to do the same. Tell your government that you saw what is going on, and that you are opposed.”

*Tell the story and take action!* Our faith requires action along with the words. That action needs to be persistent, and consistent with the teachings that Jesus taught, of peace and justice, reconciliation and love. We need to demonstrate our love to others in ways that match our talk, strongly opposing the evil our governments perpetrate on humans created in the image of God.

*We keep saying that. —GEW*

## ~ *OTHER VOICES...*

BY Nathan Guttman

**Israel’s operation in Gaza was criticized internationally, even by Washington. The UN says 2,000 Palestinians were made homeless this month by Israeli house demolitions.**

### ***Caterpillar Urged to Limit Bulldozer Sales to Israel***

***Israel uses company bulldozers to demolish Palestinian homes in the territories.***

**P**rotest groups in the US have increased pressure on the heavy-equipment manufacturer Caterpillar to limit sales to Israel because it uses company bulldozers to demolish Palestinian homes in the territories. Protest peaked at the annual shareholders meeting last month in Chicago, where protesters succeeded in issuing a draft proposal calling on the company to look into whether the sale of bulldozers to the Israeli army is consistent with its “code of worldwide business conduct,” which states that Caterpillar products must “contribute to an environment in which all people can work safely and live healthy, productive lives.” Hundreds demonstrated in front of corporate headquarters in Peoria, Illinois, demanding a stop to sales to Israel.

Protest against selling bulldozers to Israel began with the start of the second *intifada*/uprising and picked up steam after American peace activist Rachel Corrie was crushed to death by an IDF bulldozer in the Gaza Strip. The struggle entered a new phase when the California-based organization *Jewish Voice for Peace* teamed up with two groups of Catholic nuns and bought \$2,000 worth of Caterpillar shares, entitling them to attend the annual meeting and present draft resolutions. Their “moderate” proposal, which called upon the company to examine whether sales to Israel are consistent with its business code, received support from four percent of shareholders—not nearly enough to pass, but viewed as an achievement by its proponents.

“The importance of this act is in bringing the issue to the awareness of the shareholders,” said Liat Weingart, programs director for *Jewish Voice for Peace*. Weingart promised to raise the matter again at the next annual shareholders meeting. “Caterpillar is the perfect example of a company that has a positive image of building infrastructure, but its products are being used to destroy the family infrastructure in the territories,” she added.

Kevin Clark of the Stop CAT coalition said protesters will next call on Arab countries—major Caterpillar customers—to stop doing business with the manufacturer. Caterpillar’s chair and CEO Jim Owens refused to meet with protest representatives. At the shareholders meeting he said, “We have enormous compassion for the families involved,” but noted that Caterpillar cannot monitor the use of over two million of its products worldwide.

—*Jewish Voice for Peace*

**BY Elizabeth W. Corrie**

*“Rachel worked in Rafah...*

*Undoubtedly, she knew some of the people killed or made homeless by this latest attack.*

*Rachel died in Rafah...”*

## ***The Bulldozing Crisis: Caterpillar Should Do the Right Thing.***

Unable to sleep, I decided to write. For the past weeks, my email box has been flooded with desperate pleas for help from the people in Rafah, a Palestinian village on the border with Egypt. Since last week, the Israeli Army has relentlessly hammered those people, destroying hundreds of homes, leaving about 2000 civilians homeless. The image of these people, standing by helplessly as they watch their walls and roofs cave in under the pressure of the armored D-9 and D-10 American-made Caterpillar bulldozers—supplied to the Israeli army by the US government—has destroyed my sleep.

This image would make anyone of conscience sleepless, but it makes me sleepless because I cannot stop thinking about the horror my cousin Rachel would have felt witnessing this attack. Rachel worked in Rafah. Undoubtedly, she knew some of the people killed, wounded and/or made homeless by this latest attack. Rachel died in Rafah, falling victim to the crushing blade of the bulldozer, the driver so intent on destroying a home that he had to destroy human life to do so.

When I pointedly mention that Caterpillar manufactured the bulldozer used to kill Rachel, I am sometimes asked whether it is reasonable to suggest that Caterpillar bears some responsibility for Rachel’s death, and for the deaths and homelessness of Palestinians. I concede that, legally, it is difficult to make this case. Morally, however, it is not, and it is to the consciences of the people who manage, work for, and invest in Caterpillar that I appeal. If Rachel’s death, underreported as it was, did not make clear the inappropriate use of Caterpillar’s products, surely the current attack on Rafah—even members of the Bush Administration have stepped out of its typically unquestioning support of Israeli policy to express concern—should have driven this point home.

The Israeli Army takes Caterpillar bulldozers, armors them, and uses them to inflict collective punishment on Palestinian civilians, in violation of international law. More to the point, it does so in violation of Caterpillar’s own published policy of social responsibility, which states that its “commitment to financial success must also take into account social, economic, political, and environmental priorities,” a policy guided by “high ethical standards” that seek to guarantee its “reputation for integrity.”

Is Caterpillar *legally* responsible for the way Israel perverts its bulldozers from tools of construction into weapons of destruction? Maybe not. Does it have a *moral* responsibility, as outlined in its own system of values, to investigate how its products are used and to preserve its “reputation for integrity” by holding its clients accountable to the same standard it holds for itself? Yes! ...Not because it is good business practice—although retrieving the good name of Caterpillar from its association with war crimes is surely good business practice—but because it is the right thing to do.

—*Elizabeth Corrie is the cousin of Rachel Corrie. She can be reached at [corrie@counterpunch.org](mailto:corrie@counterpunch.org)*

## ***Churches Press Bush on Problems Facing Holy Land Christians***

***“Unfortunately, most American Christians remain woefully uninformed about what is happening in the very land where Jesus walked.”***

Fifty leaders of evangelical and mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches and church-related organizations recently delivered a letter to President Bush asking for a full understanding of “the crisis in the Holy Land confronting Christian Palestinians, Christian institutions, and those who wish to visit the birthplace of Christianity.” Stating that the “churches have directed their concerns to the Israeli government, but to little avail,” the church leaders appealed for the President’s intervention to help restore the normal functioning of Christian institutions in Israel and the Occupied Territories, and claimed that “it is generally acknowledged that relations of the churches and these institutions with the Israeli government may be the worst they have ever been.”

The letter addressed the church leaders’ concerns, specifically regarding the effects of the separation barrier being constructed by Israel, taxation issues that may force some church institutions to close due to the removal of their longstanding tax-exempt status, and “the denial and delay of visas, by Israel, for clergy and church personnel result[ing] in understaffed seminaries, churches, hospitals, education and other institutions.”

One of the signers, Brother Robert Schieler, of the De La Salle Christian Brothers who administer Bethlehem University, emphasized the destructive effects of the separation barrier on Christian and Palestinian populations: “Even if the barrier is intended for security, it has had the very real effects of separating students and faculty from their classrooms, families from one another, farmers from their fields, and Christian worshippers from their churches.” The church leaders observe in their letter to the American president, “We find it difficult to be assured by your description on April 14 of the barrier as ‘temporary’ in light of Israel’s plans to extend the barrier far beyond the 1967 Green Line, encompassing on the Israeli side those large West Bank settlements that you implied would remain part of Israel.”

Bro. Schieler noted further, “The barrier and checkpoints are now cutting off Christians in Bethlehem from Jerusalem just a few miles away. I wonder if [North American] Christians who visit Bethlehem as tourists know that many of their Christian brothers and sisters who live and work and worship where Jesus was born are not able to travel just a few miles to Jerusalem to where Jesus died and was risen. Unfortunately, most American Christians remain woefully uninformed about what is happening in the very land where Jesus walked.”

Letter signers included the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches; the Presiding Bishops and leaders of many denominations, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America; and Armenian Church of America; evangelical leaders including Leighton Ford, Robert Seiple, and Ron Sider; the heads of relief and development agencies such as the Mennonite Central Committee, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision, Church World Service, and many others.

The signers, while specifically raising the concerns of church institutions and Palestinian Christians, stated clearly that they “do not mean to minimize the suffering of Muslims and Jews.” The letter ended by imploring the President to assist all Muslims, Jews, and Christians in the Holy Land, stating, “Your help is needed as a force for peacemaking that builds bridges to a new and hopeful future.” [*The complete text of the letter, and the list of signers, is available at <http://www.cmep.org/letters/BushLetter.pdf>.*]

—from a release by *Churches for Middle East Peace*

BY Lily Galili

*Some 600 reserve soldiers and officers now refuse to serve  
in the [occupied] territories for reasons of conscience.*

### ***Conscientious Objection Could Be ‘Positive Phenomenon.’***

Israeli Attorney-General Menachem Mazuz shocked the political establishment recently by expressing tentative, if qualified, support for conscientious objection, saying he understood what was potentially a ‘positive phenomenon.’ But a right-wing coalition whip quickly responded that Mazuz “was wrong to say things that could be interpreted as indifference to the grave practice of political criminality that undermines the foundations of democracy. The attorney general does not have the privilege to say things that could be interpreted as empathy for lawbreakers.” But lawmakers on the left welcomed the remarks and said the Knesset should follow in Mazuz’s footsteps and pass a law that would recognize the right of youth from across the political spectrum to refuse army service on conscientious grounds.

Several Knesset members have already submitted a bill that would allow refuseniks for reasons of religion, faith, and conscience to choose alternative national service instead of military service. And the *Courage to Refuse* group said, “The attorney general has joined a large and respectable group of leading legal authorities and public figures who understand that refusal to serve is founded on morality, caring, and love of the country.” According to *Courage to Refuse*, there are now some 600 reserve soldiers and officers who refuse to serve in the territories for reasons of conscience.

“I can understand the phenomenon of youth struggling over beliefs and opinions,” Mazuz told the Israel Bar Association in Eilat. “This seems like it could be a positive phenomenon that demonstrates social involvement and concern. Refusal to serve, and civil disobedience for political reasons, are an integral part of the Israeli reality in the last few decades,” he said. He classified conscientious objection as an expression of human rights, as the Supreme Court had ruled previously. Mazuz’s surprising statement boosted conscientious objection just when the trend seemed to be weakening. The last intifada, which created a semblance of consensus in Israeli society, brought a far-reaching change in the extent of refuseniks and the attitude toward them. The sweeping social condemnation cracked as left-wing politicians, public figures, and senior academics openly supported them.

From something beyond the pale, conscientious objection forced itself into the public discourse. One of the main fears of the left was that supporting it would legitimize right-wing disobedience when it comes to evacuating settlements. In view of the concern in the army and the military’s sharpened response to refuseniks, the attorney general’s utterance, from the heart of the Israeli establishment, is all the more unexpected.

—Ha’aretz, Jerusalem

BY Yuval Yoaz

*“The teenagers’ support for refusenik positions  
is a warning light that demands attention.”*

### ***A Quarter of Israeli Teens Want Out!***

Some 27% of Israeli teenagers do not think they will remain in Israel, compared to 13% of adults, according to a survey conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute two months ago. Nearly 50% of Israeli teenagers do not feel they are “part of the country and its problems,” compared to a quarter of adults, the survey found. The survey, entitled *Democracy Index-Teenage Positions*, is

part of the Institute's annual Democracy Index. The study also found that 43% of the teens support either refusal to serve in the territories or refusal to eject settlers, compared with 25% of those aged 18 and older, according to the study.

"The teenagers' support for refusenik positions is a warning light that demands attention," said the surveyors. The survey found that teens are more supportive than adults of refusenik positions of all kinds. While 75% of adults said a soldier must not refuse an order to evacuate settlers, only 57% of teens agreed with that statement. A slightly smaller gap was found regarding the refusal to serve in the territories: 71% of adults compared to 57% of teens said soldiers cannot refuse on grounds that they object to Israel's policy toward Palestinians.

—Ha'aretz, Jerusalem

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## ***Darkness and Light—a Hasidic Parable***

*A Rabbi asked his students, "When is it, at dawn, that one can tell the light from the darkness?" One student replied, "When I can tell a goat from a donkey." "No," answered the Rabbi. Another said, "When I can tell a palm tree from a fig?" "No," answered the rabbi again.*

*"Well then, what is the answer?" his students pressed him. "Only when you look into the face of every man and every woman and see your brother and your sister," said the Rabbi. "Only then have you seen the light. All else is still darkness."*

—from "Seeking Peace" by Johann Christoph Arnold

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*A recent study shows that secular Israelis have been steadily moving out of the capital.*

## ***Jerusalem Becoming 'More Religious'***

Jerusalem is home to 692,300 residents, according to data published last month by the Central Bureau of Statistics, and is the country's most populous city and its largest geographically (twice as big as Tel Aviv). The city's population grew in 2003 by some 12,000 residents. Some 66 percent of Jerusalem's residents in 2002 were Jewish, 31 percent Muslim, and 2 percent Christian, while another one percent were immigrants who are not registered with the Population Registry as Jewish.

Thirty-five percent of the capital's population is children under the age of 15. Some 53 percent attended ultra-Orthodox schools, 18 percent studied at religious schools, and 28 percent went to secular schools. Recent years have seen a steady rise in the number of students attending ultra-Orthodox schools, *Ma'ariv* newspaper reported. According to a recent study, figures show that secular Israelis have been steadily moving out of the capital, while the ultra-Orthodox (now 30% of the Jews in the capital) are moving to the outskirts of the city.

With its higher birth rate, the Arab population of Jerusalem is steadily rising. But many Israeli Arab residents have moved out of Jerusalem to surrounding areas, even though they retain their official Jerusalem residence and Israeli identity card in order to receive city benefits.

—Israelinsider

## ***You And I***

***I wept today, and you will weep tomorrow.  
Maybe you've wept for your husband,  
and tomorrow you'll weep for your son.  
Let me tell you,  
I've already wept for both my son and my husband.***

***I wish I could walk into every house around,  
Carrying within me  
anguish and heartache and mourning.  
Come, mother of Ibrahim and mother of Itzhak,  
Let's weep together, you and I.  
Longing for our loved ones unites us, you and me.  
Motherhood unites us, you and me.  
The heart aches.***

***Let's remember,  
if in life there is no place for us on the earth,  
we have place enough under it.  
Let's pray together, mother of Ibrahim and mother of Itzhak,  
You and I are the conscience.  
You and I are love and peace.  
You and I are the bridge to truth.***

*—An anonymous Palestinian mother from Ramallah, addressing a gathering of Jewish women,  
read this poem in Arabic and translated into Hebrew [Ibrahim/Abraham; Itzhak/Isaac].*

## ***Now Eastern Wall of Temple Mount in Danger of Collapse***

The eastern wall of Jerusalem's Temple Mount, with the Eastern or Golden Gate facing the Mount of Olives, is in danger of immediate collapse, which could cause a "domino effect" and bring down other sections of ancient compound, the head of the Israel Antiquities Authority said.

A team of senior Egyptian and Jordanian engineers undertook tests a month ago to determine the stability of the eastern wall, then issued a classified report which stated that the 2,000-year-old wall was in danger of immediate collapse as a result of a February earthquake that rattled this region. The report says that the February 11 earthquake damaged the eastern wall to such an extent that sections of the wall are liable to cave in on the underground architectural support of the mount, known as Solomon's Stables. New cracks and movements in the already fragile wall were discerned by archaeologists following the earthquake, the report states.

Meanwhile, repairs continue to the south wall of the Temple Mount where a large bulge began to form almost two years ago. At the time there were accusations that the trucks and loader tractors working beneath the Temple Mount had damaged the structure and weakened it severely.

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