

Middle East Network Newsletter

January 26, 2010

ELCA staff comments on the Palestine Kairos statement

A moment of truth: A word of faith and hope from the heart of Palestinian suffering, are now posted [here](#).

NILI Trip

New England Synod Bishop Margaret Payne represented Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson on [a delegation to the Middle East](#) organized by the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative (NILI). NILI is a group of many of the nation's most prominent Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders who collaboratively work to mobilize broad public support for active, fair and firm U.S. leadership in pursuit of Arab-Israeli-Palestinian peace. [Click here](#) to read the news story and visit Bishop Payne's blog [here](#).

Bethlehem University Student Completes Degree, Ceremony Held in Gaza

Bethlehem University Student Berlanty Azzam, who was deported by the Israeli military to Gaza in October, 2009, has finished her degree long-distance and celebrated her graduation at Holy Family Church in Gaza. Bethlehem University officials traveled to Gaza to mark the occasion and to show support for students awaiting permission from the Israeli military to attend Bethlehem University. Azzam's case received support from around the world, including advocacy by Churches for Middle East Peace and the ELCA in a letter from Bishop Bruce Burnside, chair of the Conference Committee on Middle East Issues. For more, [click here](#).

ELCA member deported from Israel

Recently ELCA member Faith Rowold, who had been serving as a volunteer with our companion, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), was deported by Israel. After unsuccessful efforts on her behalf, the ELCA and the ELCJHL have been told by the Israeli authorities that there is no further recourse for our two institutions. We sincerely regret that Rowold's volunteer work with the ELCJHL was not allowed to continue and are very grateful for her two years of faithful and excellent service to the church in the Holy Land.

In response to queries about **how individuals can respond to this and similar cases**, here are a few suggestions:

1. Use [Peace Not Walls Website worship resources](#) to **plan a prayer service** on behalf of church workers deported and/or barred from entry for service in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and to pray for all persons detained wrongfully for political purposes.
 2. **Learn about the range of recent such cases** (of detention, deportation and denial of entry) at the Websites of the peace organizations listed on the [Peace Not Walls Partners](#) pages
See also this recent report from Ha'aretz, [Israel withholding NGO employees' work permits](#), and related article from the Jerusalem Post, [GPO calls for journalist visa for foreign press](#)
 3. **Call or write your members of Congress** noting that the Israeli government policies noted above are at odds with our own American values of freedom of access, speech and press, and are in contrast with the open welcome accorded to Israeli rabbis and other religious personnel seeking to live and work in the United States.
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New reports and statements

Thank Your Representative for Urging Improved Conditions for Gaza

Thank you for contacting your representative to urge support for two recent House letters on Gaza. The [letter to President Obama](#) circulated by Reps. Jim McDermott (WA) and Keith Ellison (MN) calling for urgent efforts to address the dire situation in Gaza, garnered 54 signatures. The [letter to Secretary Clinton](#) circulated by Reps. Jim Moran (VA) and Bob Inglis (SC) calling for support for higher education opportunities for Gaza students was

signed by 33 representatives. [Click here](#) for a list of signers on the first letter and [here](#) for the second. If your representative signed one or both letters, tell him or her THANK YOU today!

Failing Gaza: No rebuilding, no recovery, no more excuses A report one year after Operation Cast Lead

According to a group of non-governmental organizations working in the region, "The international community has betrayed the people of Gaza by failing to back their words with effective action to secure the ending of the Israeli blockade which is preventing reconstruction and recovery." [Report with recommendations](#)

Health care in Gaza

Highlighting the impact of the blockade on Gaza on the health of Gaza's population and on health services, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and the Association of International Development Agencies have called for an immediate opening of the crossings. "[The closure of the Gaza Strip puts at risk the health of people in Gaza and undermines the functioning of the health care system.](#)"

UNRWA Launches 2010 Emergency Appeal, Urges International Community to Work to End Conflict

Recently the 2010 Emergency Appeal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was launched at a meeting in East Jerusalem of representatives of the Agency and its major donors. The appeal event, hosted by Director of West Bank operations Barbara Shenstone and Deputy Director of operations in the Gaza Strip, Sebastien Trives, came a year and a day after the conclusion of Israel's war on Gaza. Donors yesterday heard how the humanitarian situation in the besieged Strip remained characterized by unemployment, food insecurity and socio-economic decline. [Learn More](#)

Zoning in Area C

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) issued a [report](#) on Israel's highly restrictive zoning regime in what is known as Area C of the West Bank, which covers 60 per cent of the land, although the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian population resides in Areas A and B. Area C holds the land reserves necessary for the development of the main population centres and a significant part of the agricultural and grazing land, and because it is the only contiguous territory in the West Bank, it is critical for the implementation of any large-scale infrastructure projects.

But, OCHA said, Palestinian construction is effectively prohibited in some 70 percent of Area C, while in the remaining 30 percent, a range of restrictions virtually eliminates the possibility of obtaining a building permit. As a result of this restrictive planning regime, tens of thousands of Palestinians wishing to build in most parts of Area C are left with no choice other than to carry out unauthorized construction on their land to meet their housing needs. As a consequence, they risk demolition of their structures and subsequent displacement, OCHA added.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

