

**Statement on the 2010 Report of the Middle East Study Committee of the
Presbyterian Church (USA)**

**Reform Rabbinic Leaders Decry Renewal of Anti-Israel Rhetoric from National
Presbyterian Leadership**

In 2004, the American Jewish community was stunned when the Presbyterian Church (USA) took several harsh anti-Israel positions at its General Assembly. After long decades of positive, fruitful cooperation with the Presbyterian Church on both interfaith relations and a wide variety of social justice initiatives, Reform Rabbis who are members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis were shocked that no consultation or discussion with our community had preceded the adoption of these one-sided anti-Israel "Overtures," which, among other things, called for "phased selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel."

We came to find that we were not alone among those who were surprised by the national Presbyterian action. When we approached our Presbyterian friends and partners at the local level, seeking some understanding, we found that they, too, had been taken by surprise. We were delighted when, in one community after another, Presbyterian Churches and regional Presbyteries took formal positions opposing the General Assembly's action. We were gratified when the Church's 2006 General Assembly rescinded the negative language focused exclusively at Israel and called for "a new season of mutual understanding and dialogue."

Reform Rabbis have longed shared with Presbyterians and other Christians a deep concern for the welfare of the Palestinian people, unmitigated by our shared commitment to a secure, Jewish State of Israel. Together, we have advocated for a two-state solution to the problem of a Jewish State beset by enemies and a Palestinian people living under conditions none of us would accept. Reform Rabbis, Presbyterian clergy and both Jewish and Presbyterian lay people broke new ground in the aftermath of the deplorable 2004 action of the national Church, increasing our dialogue, shared study, and joint action.

In recent months, though, we have become increasingly concerned. We have been aware of the work of the Church's Middle East Study Committee. The composition of the Study Committee worried us, with a majority known to be most unsympathetic to Israel. We were further dismayed when a notable and progressive member, Rev. John Wimberly, resigned from the Study Committee, citing the majority's anti-Israel bias. Pledges made in the aftermath of the 2004 debacle, that future initiatives would include significant dialogue with American Jewish leaders, were ignored by the Study Committee.

Now, we have read and studied the Study Committee's Report. Our fears prove warranted. The Report is an egregious anti-Israel diatribe, making selective use of facts and a selective reading of history to build a case against Israel and to erase almost 1900 years of Jewish presence in and connection to the Land of Israel. The Study strikes an arrogant posture, presuming to tell the American Jewish community how we should

approach our own brothers and sisters in Israel. The Report endorses a document known as “*Kairos / A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering,*” a declaration by a small group of Palestinian Christian leaders which delegitimizes Israel, echoes in supersessionist theology, and while promoting non-violent resistance, ultimately justifies terrorism aimed at Israel. The Report is more troubling even than the 2004 divestment Overture, now suggesting an end to U.S. aid to Israel, striking at the core of the unique bond between the United States and Israel. The Report’s use of classical anti-Jewish themes is reprehensible and contradicts the Church’s own 1987 document, “A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews,” as well as a praiseworthy 2010 Overture, entitled, “Christians and Jews: People of God.”

In the two months between now and the beginning of this summer’s General Assembly, Reform Rabbis will be talking with our local Presbyterian colleagues and friends. We will engage in a dialogue that the national Presbyterian Church (USA) and its Middle East Study Committee did not. We will read the Middle East Study Committee’s report together. We will explain that the Study Committee’s Report is insulting to us; indeed, that it brings us deep pain. We will pray that the local Presbyterians who convene in General Assembly in July will reject the Study Committee’s Report.

While the outcome at the General Assembly may severely impact relationships, Reform Rabbis who are members of the CCAR, the world’s largest organization of Jewish clergy, will struggle to find ways to continue our work with likeminded local Presbyterian clergy and friends to pursue our shared social justice mission, to further our interfaith dialogue and study, and to do our part to bring peace to the Middle East, to the Jewish State of Israel and to a hoped-for future Palestinian State; indeed, to all of God’s creation.

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