

Middle East Notes // Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns July 3, 2014



Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes.](#)

This week's Middle East Notes focuses primarily on the murders of the three Israeli teenagers, the two-week search for them, Israeli accusations of Hamas and Hamas' denial of responsibility for the abduction and murder. Also provided is analysis and implications of the Presbyterian Church (USA) vote to divest from three companies that it says supply Israel with equipment used in the occupation of Palestinian territory; proposed force feeding of Palestinians; the growth of European governments' boycott of the settlements; and other issues. **Note: The next Middle East Notes will appear on July 24; after an August break it will return on September 4.** For daily news of Israel/Palestine, click any of the following links:

[Ha'aretz](#) [Ma'an News](#) [Americans for Peace Now](#) [Tikkun](#)

- The June 20 and June 30 Middle East Notes, written before the discovery of the three teenagers, focus on the search for them, analysis of the kidnapping, and other issues.
- The Ma'an News Agency reports that Israeli forces discovered the bodies of the three missing teenagers on June 30.
- Barak Ravid and Jonathan Lis in Ha'aretz report on Israeli responses to the murders.
- Jack Houry in Ha'aretz states that Hamas denies blame for teens' murders, and that Gaza braces for Israeli strike.
- Michael Omer-Man in +972 states that the kidnappings led to the largest military operation in the West Bank since the second Intifada.
- Uri Avnery from Gush Shalom and Mazin Qumsiyeh respond to the teenagers' murder.
- Mahmoud Jabari writes in Ma'an that security coordination between the IDF and Palestinian security personnel must be based on respect, not Israeli whims.
- Christian Peacemaker Teams note that Operation Brother's Keeper was planned with Israeli cooperation in preparation for Fatah and Hamas taking the initial steps to form a unity government.
- Ma'an reports that a spokesman for the Palestinian Authority said that the number of Palestinian children in Israeli jails has surpassed 250.
- Laurie Goodstein writes in the New York Times about the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s vote at its general convention to divest from three companies that it says supply Israel with equipment used in the occupation of Palestinian territory.
- Americans for Peace Now released this press statement after the Presbyterians' vote.
- Brant Rosen in Tikkun Daily notes Jewish establishment leaders' displeasure toward the PC(USA) in the wake of its recent decision to divest.
- Zvi Bar'el writes in Ha'aretz that the force-feeding debate misses point on Israel's true transgression since it deflects the debate from administrative detention, torture and prison conditions and provides a thousand witnesses that the occupation's values are dictating the country's identity.
- Barak Ravid in Ha'aretz writes that the French government has issued a warning to its citizens not to engage in financial activity or investments in the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem or the Golan Heights.
- Barak Ravid also reports in Ha'aretz that the EU envoy to Israel said that the warnings issued by Spain, Italy and France against doing business with Israeli settlements point towards the fact that EU member states "are losing their patience with concerns not being treated" by Israel.
- A recent Ha'aretz editorial warns that the European boycott of the settlements is gaining momentum, and Israel better take heed.

1a) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, June 20, 2014

NB: The following two issues of the CMEP Bulletin were published before the bodies of the three murdered teenagers were found.

Search for teens engulfs West Bank: On June 16, Israeli teens Eyal Yifrach (19), Gilad Shaar (16), and Naftali Frenkel (16) were kidnapped while hitchhiking from their religious school in the West Bank, located about halfway between Jerusalem and Hebron ... One of the teens managed to call the police and say, "We've been kidnapped." The last signal from the cellphone came from an area near Hebron, the largest Palestinian city in the West Bank.

On Friday, the Israeli Defense Forces began to search Palestinian homes ... and by Sunday, the military erected checkpoints around the city, closed the nearby crossing into Israel to all Palestinians and placed a travel ban on all male Hebron ages 16 to 50 traveling to Jordan. ...

Palestinian political commentator Fadi Elsalameen suggests Netanyahu's [blame of Hamas has] merit. He wrote, "According to Palestinian intelligence sources I spoke with, Hamas is willing to pay millions of dollars for kidnapped Israelis for the sole purpose of exchanging them with prisoners." He also notes that Netanyahu isn't not placing his blame based on "solid evidence of who the kidnappers are, but based on intelligence agencies' analysis and previous reports which clearly show Hamas has the most to gain from such kidnappings and in fact have tried several times before unsuccessfully to carry out such kidnappings."

Famed Israeli negotiator Gershon Baskin is more skeptical. He wrote, "If it is Hamas, which I admit I have great doubts about, the operation was probably decided by the cell which undertook it, without the direct participation of either Hamas's military wing Izzadin Kassam, or its political wing."

Hamas has praised the abductions but called accusations that it was responsible "stupid and baseless."

Netanyahu is also placing blame on Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and his new Hamas-backed government for the teens' kidnapping. He told the media, "Israel warned the international community about the dangers of endorsing the Fatah-Hamas unity pact... The dangers of that pact should now be abundantly clear to all." One Palestinian official has told the Times of Israel that, "the kidnapping would mark a breach of the understandings between Fatah and Hamas, and would render their unity agreement null and void."

In a speech in Saudi Arabia Wednesday, Abbas said, "Those who perpetrated this act want to destroy us [the Palestinians]... The three young men are human beings just like us and must be returned to their families."

The kidnappings have put Abbas in a difficult position. He has pledged to maintain security cooperation with Israel to free the teens and said, "It's in our interest that there is security coordination between us and Israel in order to protect ourselves, to protect our people... We do not want to go back to the anarchy or destruction that happened in the second intifada." ...

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)

1b) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, June 30, 2014

Israel's West Bank offensive winds down: This week the massive Israeli manhunt and campaign of arrests and interrogations directed against Hamas and its supporters in the West Bank, that some have called collective punishment, following the abduction of three Israeli students near Hebron on June 12 began to wind down without signs of the missing students. The campaign has left six Palestinians dead, 560 arrests, home demolitions, and temporary closure of educational, media and relief institutions. Hundreds remain in prison. A travel ban on those living in Hebron now has been partly lifted. The UN Security Council failed to agree on a statement condemning Israel's actions.

Abbas and Netanyahu: On June 16 Palestinian Authority President Abbas initiated a conversation with Prime Minister Netanyahu in which he condemned the kidnappings, as well as the Israeli's military West Bank incursions ... On June 18, ... Abbas issued a strong statement again condemning the abductions and saying those who carried them out were hurting the Palestinian cause. He also said that should it turn out that Hamas was responsible for the kidnappings this would force him to review political cooperation between Hamas and Fatah that is planned to lead to parliamentary election. The response from Netanyahu's office was reserved and skeptical, first accusing Abbas of posturing and then saying his words would be judged by the degree of PA cooperation in helping to recover the missing students.

This week Abbas asked Netanyahu to denounce the deaths of Palestinians shot during the Israeli West Bank offensive. "I said the kidnapping was a crime, but does that justify the killing of three Palestinian teens in cold blood?" Abbas asked, adding, "... We're human beings, just like you. Can the Israeli government demonstrate the same feelings and say they are human beings and deserve to live? The Palestinian people are frustrated over how they are treated. As if the Israelis were human beings and the Palestinians are not. We don't want terror and we don't want war. We want peace."

Netanyahu responded saying there has been "... a certain degree of friction with the civilian population of Judea and Samaria, but we have no intention of maliciously harming anyone." Netanyahu then went on to say, "The Israeli forces are acting in a manner consistent with the requirements of self-defense and occasionally there are victims or injuries on the Palestinian side as a result of the self-defense activities of our forces."

In response to a degree of ongoing security cooperation between Israeli and PA security forces, Palestinian youth June 22 attacked the Palestinian police headquarters in Ramallah. Three persons were wounded.

Accusations of Hamas involvement: From the beginning Netanyahu has said that Hamas was responsible ... and called on Abbas to break off his political cooperation with Hamas. Two known Hamas operatives in Hebron have been missing since the kidnappings. This week Israeli security forces named them as responsible for the crime. However, it offered no evidence to support the accusation. ...

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)

2) Israel finds bodies of three missing teens

Ma'an, June 30, 2014

Israeli forces scouring the occupied West Bank for signs of three missing Israeli teenagers discovered their bodies Monday afternoon, its army reported.

They were found in a field in the Hebron area, not far from where they went missing, according to reports.

"Following extensive searches in order to retrieve the three abducted teens; Eyal Yifrah, Gilad Shaar and Naftali Frenkel, an effort led by the IDF, the ISA and the Israel Police, three bodies were discovered in the area north-west to Hebron, north of the community of Telem," the army said in an emailed statement.

"The bodies are currently going through forensic identification," it added. "The families of the abducted teens have been notified."

Deputy Israeli defense minister Danny Danon also confirmed their bodies had been discovered, saying they had been murdered by " Hamas terrorists " and calling for a widespread operation to "eradicate" the Islamist movement. Israeli public radio said the bodies were discovered in a field near Halhul, a town north of Hebron, about 10 minutes from the roadside in the southern West Bank where they were last seen.

Palestinians were quoted in other Israeli media saying massive amounts of forces were surrounding the city. Israel's military did not immediately respond to inquiries.

Shortly before the news was made public, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin called an urgent meeting of his security cabinet from 9:30 p.m. with ministers expected to take "operative" decisions, public radio said.

The three Israeli teenagers disappeared from the Gush Etzion settlement on June 12. Israel has blamed Hamas for kidnapping the teens, but the Islamist movement has denied involvement.

Israeli forces launched a military search campaign in response, arresting hundreds of Palestinians and shooting five dead. Over 100 were also injured throughout the operation.

3) Netanyahu on murders of three Israeli teens: Hamas is responsible and Hamas will pay Barak Ravid, Jonathan Lis, Ha'aretz, June 30, 2014

Calling the murderers of the three kidnapped teenagers “beasts,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday evening that “Hamas is responsible, and Hamas will pay.”

Netanyahu said in a statement: “In great agony, we found three dead bodies this evening, and all signs are that these are the dead bodies of our three kidnapped youths ...

“They were kidnapped and murdered in cold blood by beasts,” he continued. “In the name of the entire people of Israel, I wish to say to the dear families – the mothers, the fathers, the grandmothers and grandfathers, the sisters and brothers – that our hearts bleed, the whole nation cries with you. We will bring the boys for burial in Israel. Vengeance for the blood of a small child, Satan has not yet created. Neither has vengeance for the blood of three pure youths who were on their way home to see their parents – who will not see them again. Hamas is responsible, and Hamas will pay. May the memories of the three boys be blessed.”

President Shimon Peres said Israel’s retribution would be harsh.

“The whole nation blows its head this evening with a grief too heavy to bear,” Peres said in a statement. “These 18 days the nation has prayed in one voice that our wonderful boys would be found alive and well. Now, upon receiving the bitter news, the people of Israel mourn the untimely deaths of the best of our young. Alongside this heavy sorrow, we are determined to punish the wicked terrorists with a strong hand. Our war against terror will get stronger, it will not weaken, so that this murderous terror will not dare raise its head.”

Opposition leader MK Isaac Herzog (Labor) said, “There is no explanation or human justification [for the murders] and I’m sure that that the long arm of the security forces will reach the murderers. We have known painful attacks and overcame them, and so it will be this time. This is our life in this country.”

Meretz chairwoman Zahava Gal-On described the murders as a “war crime,” but called for a judicial rather than military response, and also insisted that Palestinian moderates be strengthened and not punished. “The boys’ kidnapping and murder is a war crime that must be punished with the full severity of the law. Nevertheless, precisely at this moment, it’s vital to distinguish between those responsible for this wicked act and between the Palestinians who denounced it, first and foremost the president of the Palestinian Authority, Abu Mazen,” she stated, using Mahmoud Abbas’ nickname.

Science and Technology Minister Jacob Perry (Yesh Atid) called on Abbas to dissolve his unity government with Hamas: “I once again urge Abu Mazen to immediately dissociate himself from the murderous terrorist organization Hamas, which perpetrated this abominable crime.”

Right-wing members of the Israeli government called for the destruction of Hamas following the discovery of the bodies of the three kidnapped teenagers on Monday. ...

[Read the entire article here.](#)

4) Hamas denies blame for teens' murders, Gaza braces for Israeli strike

Jack Khoury, Ha'aretz, July 1, 2014

Hamas in Gaza responded Monday evening to the discovery of the bodies of the three Israeli teens, kidnapped on June 12, denying complicity in the kidnapping and blaming Israel for "preparing the ground" for an attack against Gaza.

Meanwhile, Palestinian sources in the Gaza Strip said the different Palestinian factions in Gaza have announced a state of high alert and are preparing for an Israeli attack.

Eyal Yifrah, 19, from Elad, Gilad Shaar, 16, from Talmon and Naftali Fraenkel, 16, from Nof Ayalon went missing from a hitchhiking station at the Gush Etzion intersection on June 12. Their bodies were found Monday evening north of the Palestinian town Halhul, just north of Hebron. In an emergency meeting of the security cabinet, Netanyahu accused Hamas of the murders, saying: "Hamas is responsible, and Hamas will pay."

Hamas in Gaza, however, said that no Palestinian faction has accepted responsibility for the murders and that the Israeli version must not be trusted. The group's spokesperson in Gaza, Sami Abu Zuhri, told AFP that if Israel attacks Hamas, it will "open the gates of hell."

Interviewed for the Hamas TV channel, Abu Zuhri said: "We'll not sit idly by if we're attacked. Israel better be prepared to pay the price. We don't want any military confrontation with Israel, but if it will be forced on us it will look like in previous rounds."

The Islamic Jihad in Gaza has also responded to the developments, calling on Palestinians to be prepared for an Israeli attack. "I call on everyone to take Israel's threats seriously," said Khaled al-Batash, a top member of the group. "Israel's threats will not frighten us, on the contrary, they will only strengthen our stance and the righteousness of our ways."

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority refrained from issuing any formal statement, but Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has convened an emergency meeting of the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank on Monday night, his spokesperson told the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

5) Three kidnapped Israeli teens found dead in the West Bank

Michael Omer-Man, +972, June 30, 2014

Israeli military forces on Monday located the bodies of three teenage yeshiva students who have been missing and assumed kidnapped for over two weeks. The bodies of Eyal Yifrah, Gilad Shaer and Naftali Frenkel were found buried in a field near Halhoul, in the Hebron area.

The three, two of whom are 16 years old and the third 19, were hitchhiking home from their yeshiva in a West Bank settlement when they were believed to have been kidnapped.

The Israeli army was surrounding the homes of two of the suspected kidnappers within minutes of the announcement, with troops reportedly preparing to demolish the houses. In recent days, the Israeli government announced a return to its policy of punitive home demolitions.

Israeli Border Police were reported to be deployed heavily in anticipation of revenge attacks by settlers in the northern West Bank.

Following the kidnapping, Israel launched a major military operation in the West Bank, dubbed "Operation Brother's Keeper." The operation, while searching for the kidnapped teenagers in the Hebron area, also had a second aim: to target Hamas and other Palestinian groups throughout the West Bank.

Over 500 Palestinians have been arrested and six were killed during the operation thus far. The entire southern West Bank was on lockdown for over a week as troops searched homes, fields, caves and buildings. Restrictions were even placed on the ability of Hebron-area residents to travel abroad, for those who were able to leave their cities and towns.

The Israeli cabinet was called for an emergency meeting Monday night and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was expected to make a public statement.

Housing Minister Uri Ariel put out the following statement moments after the news was announced: "In war, on the one hand you need to strike down terrorists without any mercy, and on the other hand, you need to provide an suitable Zionist response." The latter part of his statement likely refers to building new settlements.

On Sunday night, tens of thousands of Israelis filled Tel Aviv's Rabin Square in a demonstration of solidarity with the teens' family.

Rachel Frenkel, Naftali's mother, pleaded that children like hers no longer be used as "bargaining chips," echoing much of the rhetoric on both sides, Jewish Israeli and Palestinian, that pleads for innocent children and civilians to be left out of violence in the Middle East conflict.

Noam Shemtov contributed to this report.

6) Two responses from Israel/Palestine

Uri Avnery writes on Gush Shalom: “The kidnapping and murder of three boys is a crime deserving all condemnation,” says former Knesset Member Uri Avnery of Gush Shalom. “No political cause can justify such an act, and among other things the perpetrators caused grave damage to the Palestinian people.

“The three boys now join the very long and terrible list of victims, members of both peoples, who were killed in the cause of a bloody conflict which has already lasted for more than a century. Also and especially on this harsh and tragic moment, it must be said: only the achievement of peace between enemies can end conflicts and put a stop to bloodshed.

“It is a stormy moment, when inflammatory cries are made for revenge and the landing of a blow on the other side. It would be a grave mistake for the State of Israel to take such a route, which would lead only to bloodshed and more bloodshed, revenge and counter-revenge and counter-counter-revenge. Only peace between Israelis and Palestinians, between the existing state of Israel and the state of Palestine which will arise at its side, bears the hope that these three boys will be the last victims.”

Mazin Qumsiyeh, Palestinian human rights activist: When will this insanity end? A sadly familiar scene over the past two weeks here in occupied Palestine: 10 Palestinians (including a 7 and 15 year old) and three Israeli settlers (16 – 19 year old) were killed. Dozens of Palestinian homes were demolished in the past two weeks. Over 570 more Palestinians were kidnapped in these two weeks making more than 6,000 abductees languishing in Israeli gulags/prisons. 1,500 Palestinian homes invaded without due process. 12 million native Palestinians still await their freedom from colonial occupation and displacement.

And Israeli leaders are promising to “do more” (genocidal mayhem?). But the question remains when will this insanity end? Can it end by negotiations between occupied and occupier; negotiations that have been going on for 22 years while Israel gets \$12 billion profit every year from its occupation? (that is not counting the billions from U.S. taxpayers).

When will Israel be led by people like the previous speaker of the Israeli Knesset Avraham Berg instead of racists like Netanyahu. Listen to the wise words of Berg: “Here are Israel’s shallow prime minister and the bumbling police, the masses who cling to futile prayers and not to a moment of human peace. Here are the country’s hypocritical chief rabbis, who just a month ago demanded promises from the pope regarding the future of the Jewish people, but in their daily lives remain silent about the fate of the people who are our neighbors, trampled beneath the pressure of occupation and racism under the leadership of rabbis who receive exorbitant salaries and benefits.... [Our] own total silence is still the loudest thing around us. We are willing to go out of our minds over one odd and troublesome Pollard, a lone kidnap victim or three kidnap victims, but we are incapable of understanding the suffering of a whole society, its cry, and the future of an entire nation that has been kidnapped by us. This, too, needs to be said and heard during this moment of clarity — and as loudly as possible.” ...

[Read his entire posting on the Window into Palestine blog here.](#)

7) Security coordination must be based on respect, not Israeli whims

Mahmoud Jabari, Ma'an, July 1, 2014

NB: This article was written before the bodies of the three teenagers were found.

In 2002, I awoke one morning to find that the Palestinian Authority's headquarters near my home in Hebron was under siege by Israeli tanks. The scene was not particularly strange since I had seen tanks and experienced curfews before, but seeing -- and not merely hearing -- tanks and F16s shelling a target before my very eyes was something new. I have to admit that since that time, one of my eminent hopes was to not see such violence repeated in the West Bank again in the future.

Over the past sixteen days, I have called multiple times to check on my family in Hebron, the scene of an intensive Israeli military operation to find the three Israeli students who are thought to have been kidnapped from a Jewish settlement nearby. During one of my calls, my six year old brother tried to tell me what he had heard about the military operation. "Did you hear about the guy who was killed in Hebron?" he asked. "Did you see the photo from the houses searched by the Israeli army? They have been searching every home."

For a moment, I went silent and did not know how to explain the situation to a six-year-old child who has to hear the tragic news happening all around him in his own city. This is not so different, however, from the tragic news that the relatives and families of the disappeared students have had to hear and bear in these last few weeks.

The kidnapping of three students cannot be justified nor accepted morally nor politically. It is also surprising, since in the last few years, there has been an increasingly widespread, collective national Palestinian agreement on the necessity of using peaceful means of struggle against the Israeli occupation as a means to end the occupation and achieve independence.

There are many Palestinians who think that the possible kidnapping of three Israeli students -- their ideologies and backgrounds aside -- is an unacceptable action. However, the current Israeli military actions on the ground are only making things worse, and could potentially undermine the possibility of peace anytime in the near future.

Examining the current Israeli military operation in the West Bank -- particularly in Hebron -- makes clear a number of points, however, and suggests that what we are seeing today is not just about bringing back three Israeli students.

Firstly, the Israeli government has just received a perfect opportunity to justify an unjustifiable escalation in the West Bank. When Israel commits collective punishment against the Palestinian people, banning Palestinians from Hebron from entering their places of work in Israel, imposing movement restrictions across the West Bank, depriving Palestinians from Hebron the right to cross the border into Jordan to travel outside of the country, and implementing searches of hundreds of Palestinian houses in a brutal manner, it antagonizes more people, many of whom do not necessarily support what happened to the Israeli students. To add to that, five Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces across the West Bank ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

8) It's not about Hamas. It's the Illegal settlements

Christian Peacemaker Teams Palestine, June 20, 2014

Operation Brother's Keeper [the search effort to find the three Israeli teenagers], as was explained earlier this week, was planned in advance with the cooperation of Israel's military brass, intelligent services, the politico and the settlement establishment in preparation for Fatah and Hamas taking the initial steps to form a unity government. Last week, [Christian Peacemaker Teams Palestine] posted an article explaining that the current operations in Hebron and the greater West Bank area and the Gaza Strip weren't about an investigation of a missing persons report, but the co-opting of a national tragedy to manufacture the political capital to finance the destabilization of the Palestinian nation.

Ha'aretz and other left-leaning news agencies have adopted this general framework for reporting on Operation Brother's Keeper, highlighting the overwhelming Palestinian arrests, home raids, and targeting of financial institutions to build upon the premises that the current military assaults are really about targeting Hamas rather than investigating the missing persons report.

This argument is only partially true and it adds to the misconception that the majority of the military and intelligentsia resources are cutting into Hamas' social, political, and financial infrastructure across the West Bank, Gaza, and Hebron specifically. A brief analysis of manufacturing public consent to engage in a prolonged operation, coupled with the systematic targeting of institutions and charitable organizations in Hebron raises certain questions about the intent of Operation Brother's Keeper.

This fact, in connection with the historical patterns of Israeli settlement expansion reveals that the end game isn't about inflicting a fatal blow to Hamas through collective punishment: Operation Brother's Keeper is a tactical plan to create a political milieu that the international community will stand aside as Israel expands the colonial project across the West Bank.

Hamas: A marketing strategy: Hamas is more of an Israeli marketing strategy – a “necessary illusion” - as it is an existential threat to the state. For the Israeli military, “Hamas” is the quintessential brand name for packaging its use of force against Palestinian civil society and selling it to the Israeli public and the international community. People are quick to support the use of force to establish or maintain security, particularly when framed as a preemptive measure against “terrorist” elements.

After 9/11 the world began to adopt the War on Terror narrative, and the politics of fear entered center stage. This shifted Israel's belligerent occupation of Palestinian lands from a Human Rights and International Law paradigm, one in which the government is legally responsible for the health and wellbeing of the population, to one of suppressing a population with a legal system constructed to demolish homes, detain of children, imprison Palestinians indefinitely, issue curfews across cities, close access points to communities which restricts freedom of movement, construct apartheid roads of Jewish exclusivity that link up to Jewish communities built on annexed Palestinian land all under the guise of combating terrorism. ...

[*Read the entire extensive blog posting at CPT Palestine.*](#)

9) Number of Palestinian children in Israeli jails “surpasses 250”

Ma’an, June 25, 2014

RAMALLAH (Ma’an) -- The number of Palestinian children in Israeli jails has surpassed 250 in the wake of the ongoing military search campaign in the West Bank, a Palestinian Authority lawyer said Tuesday.

“Israel is violating international children’s rights agreements by detaining Palestinian minors, and it is trying to cover up these violations with the story of the three missing settlers,” Hiba Masalha said in a statement.

The Israeli army launched a massive military campaign in the West Bank following the disappearance of three Israeli teenagers from the Gush Etzion settlement on June 12. Israeli forces have arrested hundreds of Palestinians and killed five throughout the search for the teens, who Israel alleges were kidnapped by Hamas. “Detaining Palestinian children from their houses in the middle of the night without informing their parents and families of the reasons for their detention is kidnapping,” Masalha added.

The statement said Palestinian children are often subjected to violence upon being arrested and interrogated in Israeli prisons. Sixteen-year-old Talal Khalid Sayf was detained on May 3, 2014, and claims to have been beaten badly by Israeli soldiers during the arrest process, the statement said. Sayf was left with his nose and mouth bleeding, and was also struck in the stomach and back.

Islam Mahmoud Haimouni, 17, was detained from his home on Dec. 18, 2013, according to the statement. He was taken from his home into an Israeli military vehicle and beaten until he lost consciousness.

Sixteen-year-old Hassan Sharif Ghawadrah was beaten so badly during his detention on Nov. 13, 2013 that he was taken to the hospital, before spending 15 days in solitary confinement, the statement said.

Additionally, an interrogator in Huwwara prison beat 17-year-old Musleh Hatem Mifleh in the face and pulled his hair until he confessed, the statement said.

According to a 2013 report by the UN’s Children’s Fund, Israel is the only country in the world where children are systematically tried in military courts and subjected to “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment.” Over the past decade, Israeli forces have arrested, interrogated, and prosecuted around 7,000 children between 12 and 17, mostly boys, at a rate of “an average of two children each day,” UNICEF said.

10) Presbyterians vote to divest holdings to pressure Israel **Laurie Goodstein, New York Times, June 20, 2014**

After passionate debate over how best to help break the deadlock between Israel and the Palestinians, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted on Friday at its general convention to divest from three companies that it says supply Israel with equipment used in the occupation of Palestinian territory.

The vote, by a count of 310 to 303, was watched closely in Washington and Jerusalem and by Palestinians as a sign of momentum for a movement to pressure Israel to stop building settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and end the occupation, with a campaign known as B.D.S., for Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions.

The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. — one of a handful of historic mainline Protestant denominations and the church of many American presidents — is the largest yet to endorse divestment at a churchwide convention, and the vote follows a decade of debate — and a close call at the assembly two years ago, when divestment failed by only two votes.

The measure that was passed called not only for divestment but also reaffirmed Israel's right to exist, endorsed a two-state solution, encouraged interfaith dialogue and travel to the Holy Land, and instructed the church to undertake "positive investment" in endeavors that advance peace and improve the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. The language was written by the church's 65-member Middle East committee.

The B.D.S. campaign has gained support in Europe, but has not fared as well in the United States, where two relatively small academic groups voted earlier this year to support an academic boycott of Israel, but larger groups as well as many universities have opposed it.

The companies the Presbyterian Church has targeted for divestment are Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions. The church has about \$21 million invested in these companies, a spokeswoman said. The church says it has attempted to convey its concerns over many years that these companies are profiting from Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories by selling it bulldozers, surveillance technology and other equipment.

Large American Jewish organizations lobbied the Presbyterians furiously to defeat a divestment vote, their most determined campaign yet in the 10 years the Presbyterians have considered such a step. More than 1,700 rabbis from all 50 states signed an open letter to the Presbyterian voters, saying that "placing all the blame on one party, when both bear responsibility, increases conflict and division instead of promoting peace."

In a last-ditch tactic on Thursday, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, leader of the Reform movement (the largest branch in American Judaism), addressed the assembly and offered to broker a meeting between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and the church's two top leaders so they could convey their church's concerns about the occupation — on the condition that the divestment measure was defeated. ...

[Read the entire article here.](#)

11) Americans for Peace Now statement on PC (USA) divestment decision

June 23, 2014

Americans for Peace Now issued the following statement: “Last Friday’s (decision) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to divest from three major U.S. companies should serve as a resounding warning for the Israeli government. Increasingly large segments of American society - including ones that care deeply about Israel’s future and invest in it – are losing patience with the nearly five decades-long occupation and with the Israeli government’s refusal to act seriously to bring it to an end. Pressure for decisions like the one taken by PC (USA) is growing, supported by Americans who are neither anti-Israel nor anti-Semitic. It is gaining traction as a direct consequence of Israeli policies that are deepening the occupation to the point of potential irreversibility in the near term, in tandem with the apparent inability or unwillingness of governments around the world to in any meaningful way challenge these policies.

“While the decision of PC (USA) causes great pain for many of us, the discourse and debate surrounding the decision – this year and in prior years – made clear that it is the occupation, not Israel, that is the focus of PC (USA)’s concerns and frustration. Anti-Israel forces were quick to claim PC (USA)’s decision, passed by a very narrow margin, as a victory for their odious cause, but that does not make it so. The truth – evident to anyone watching and listening to the proceedings or who reads the text of the resolution PC (USA) adopted – is that the decision was explicitly and emphatically grounded in commitment to and concern for Israel, in recognition of Israel and its right to exist with peace and security, and in rejection of boycott, divestment, and sanctions efforts targeting Israel.

“Americans for Peace Now weighs all activism in light of our primary mission: preserving Israel’s future and its security and viability as a democracy and a Jewish state. From this mission, we, as a Jewish, Zionist organization, derive our conviction that settlement expansion must stop, the settlement enterprise must be rolled back, and the occupation must end - for the sake of Israel’s own security and its own future. Consistent with this mission, we oppose boycott, divestment, and sanctions efforts targeting Israel, and we condemn organizations and activists who seek to undermine Israel’s existence.

“Consistent with this same mission and convictions, we have long argued that activism should be targeted across the Green Line separating Israel and the occupied territories. We actively call for the boycott of settlements and settlement products. With respect to divestment, we do not take a position on specific companies, including those at the center of PC (USA)’s debate. As a matter of principle, we believe it is legitimate for activists to press companies to adopt practices that deny support to settlements and the occupation, including through targeted boycotts and divestment. In such cases, we believe that the onus is on activists to demonstrate that their target is the occupation and its manifestations, rather than Israel’s existence and legitimacy.

“Likewise, as a matter of principle, we believe that activism must take into account the fact that Israel has legitimate security needs related to the occupied territories. The line between contributing to the occupation and addressing these needs may not always be clear-cut, and targeting activism narrowly enough to take into account this complicated situation presents a serious challenge. ...

[Read the entire statement here.](#)

12) The Presbyterian divestment vote: Toward a new model of community relations Brant Rosen, Tikkun Daily, June 23, 2014

In the wake of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s recent decision to divest from three companies that profit from Israel's occupation, Jewish establishment leaders have been expressing their displeasure toward the PC(USA) in no uncertain terms. Anti-Defamation League director Abe Foxman stated last week that church leaders have "fomented an atmosphere of open hostility to Israel." Rabbi Noam Marans director of inter-religious relations at the American Jewish Committee, declared that "the PC(USA) decision is celebrated by those who believe they are one step closer to a Jew-free Middle East." And Rabbi Steve Gutow, president of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, publicly accused the PC(USA) of having a "deep animus" against "both the Jewish people and the State of Israel."

Given such extreme rhetoric, it may come as a surprise to many that the same overture that called for the Presbyterian Foundation and Board of Pensions to divest from Caterpillar, Inc., Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions also included the following resolutions:

- (To) reaffirm Israel's right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders in accordance with the United Nations resolutions;
- (To) declare its commitment to a two-state solution in which a secure and universally recognized State of Israel lives alongside a free, viable, and secure state for the Palestinian people;
- (To) reaffirm PC(USA)'s commitment to interfaith dialog and partnerships with the American Jewish, Muslim friends and Palestinian Christians and call for all presbyteries and congregations within the PC(USA) to include interfaith dialogue and relationship-building as part of their own engagement in working for a just peace.
- (To) urge all church institutions to give careful consideration to possible investments in Israel-Palestine that advance peace and improve the lives of Palestinians and Israelis."

Do these sound like the words of a "hostile" church committed to a "Jew-free Middle East"? In truth, these are the words of a religious community struggling in good faith to walk the path of justice while still remaining sensitive to the concerns of their Jewish sisters and brothers.

Such a description certainly comports with my own personal experience. I attended the Presbyterian General Assembly last week as part of the Jewish Voice for Peace delegation and had lengthy conversations with numerous GA commissioners. When I asked them to share their feelings about the divestment overture, the majority responded with a similar refrain: in their hearts they wanted to vote in favor, but they hesitated because they were worried what it might do to their relationships with their Jewish family and friends and colleagues.

This theme occurred repeatedly during the committee and plenum debates as well. Commissioners who opposed the overture relied less on political arguments than upon their concern for their personal relationships with Jews and with the Jewish community at large. Many commissioners who spoke in favor of the overture expressed similar concerns even as they decided to cast their votes as a matter of deeply held conscience. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

13) Force-feeding debate misses point on Israel's true transgression

Zvi Bar'el, Ha'aretz, June 25, 2014

It's impossible not to well up with national pride amid the humanism that's threatening to flood the country. If you didn't speak up this week about the force-feeding of Palestinian prisoners you were banished from the community. If you simply asked a question in order to understand the law, you were stared at as if you had come down from Mars.

Yes to feeding or no to feeding; there's no middle ground. This is a watershed, the ultimate one, that totally distinguishes between the enlightened and the forces of darkness, between left and right, between the supporters of peace and the supporters of annexation.

It's a battle that will characterize the country's identity — not whether it's Jewish and democratic, but whether it force-feeds or doesn't. Is it "humane in a proportionate way"? Or maybe it's a barbaric nation that sees torturing prisoners as a legitimate tool.

Ethics experts are enlisting and being enlisted to explain how much this is a humane or inhumane step. Two went even further. Prof. Yechiel Michael Bar-Ilan from Tel Aviv University and Prof. Michael Gross from the University of Haifa explained in Haaretz's Hebrew edition that "a hunger strike to death's door is a violent act." No less.

And against a violent struggle we of course know what to do. Maybe it's best to define hunger strikes as terror; this would finally let us put hunger strikers on trial for terrorism. In doing so, we could turn them from administrative detainees without the benefit of a trial into prisoners who receive due process.

It's also possible to be surprised at the position of the Israel Medical Association, which compares forced-feeding to torture. "Israeli doctors will not cooperate with the law," warned Dr. Leonid Eidelman, head of the IMA. "This proposal is immoral, unprofessional and impractical."

And what if it were "only" immoral, would he have cooperated? Remember the pure ethics in the 2008 release of prisoner Omar Abu Jariban from Sheba Medical Center while he was hooked up to a loose catheter. A few hours after his release, he was dumped near an intersection, where he died. The police officers involved were investigated and punished — but what about the doctors who released him?

And what about the shocking report by Doctors Without Borders that describes in detail the cooperation between doctors and the Shin Bet security service; for example, the granting of permission to continue with interrogations and torture despite the serious condition of the person being interrogated? Of course, there has been no public discussion of these "ethics" and no profound declarations by the experts.

So why should force-feeding be any different? Well, because the force-feeding of Palestinian prisoners has nothing to do with humane treatment or ethics. Or as MK Miri Regev (Likud) said in her characteristic honesty: "They can die in their homes if they want." ...

[Read the entire article here.](#)

14) France warns citizens: Don't invest in Israeli settlements, Golan Heights

Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, June 25, 2014

The French government issued a warning to its citizens not to engage in financial activity or investments in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem or the Golan Heights. The French Foreign Ministry wrote in its warning that the settlements are illegal according to international law, and so doing business with them involves legal risks.

A French diplomat said that the warning is part of a joint act by the five largest countries in the European Union — Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain. The United Kingdom and Germany issued such warnings several months ago, and now, in light of the failure of the talks between Israel and the Palestinians and the European protests over the recent wave of construction in the settlements, three more countries joined them. Italy and Spain are expected to publish similar warnings over the next several days.

The warning was published on the French Foreign Ministry's website as part of a broader document of recommendations for French people traveling to Israel. "Due to the fact that the settlements are illegal in international law, the performance of financial activity in the settlements such as money transfers, investments, acquisition of property, provision of supplies or the performance of any other economic activities that benefit the settlements involves risks," the statement read in French.

The announcement states that the settlements had been built on occupied land and that the international community did not recognize them as part of Israel. "This could lead to a high likelihood of land disputes or disagreements regarding water, quarries or other natural resources," the statement read. "This involves risk to the image of those who carry out such economic activity... We call upon citizens or businesspeople who are considering becoming involved in economic activity in the settlements to seek appropriate legal advice before going ahead."

The French warning and the coordination among the five largest countries in the European Union has taken place against the backdrop of discussions that have been held in recent weeks in EU institutions in Brussels about issuing a general warning of the European Commission to businesspeople throughout the EU not to engage in economic activity in the settlements.

A week ago, Israel's Foreign Ministry told Israeli ambassadors throughout the EU to contact the foreign ministries of the countries where they were serving and ask that that warnings against conducting financial activity in the settlements not be issued to business people.

One Israeli diplomat said that the ambassadors were asked to say that at the present time, ... issuing such a warning could heighten tensions between Israel and European countries and cause real damage to relations.

But the French did not grant the Israeli ambassadors' requests. Foreign Ministry officials believe that once the European Commission issues a similar statement, the EU will be flooded with a wave of warnings against financial activity in the settlements throughout all [Europe] ...

[Read the entire article here.](#)

15) EU envoy: European governments losing patience with Israel over settlements

Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, June 27, 2014

The EU envoy to Israel Lars Faaborg-Andersen said on Friday that the warnings issued by Spain, Italy and France against doing business with Israeli settlements in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem, and in the Golan Heights point towards the fact that EU member states “are losing their patience with concerns not being treated” by Israel.”

Speaking at a seminar organized by the Geneva Initiative of Friday morning, Fabourg-Andersen said the warnings “should not come as a surprise.” He added that the precise wording of European Commission’s general warning regarding private bodies’ economic activity in the settlements is still being hashed out. “The EU is more consistently implementing existing policy, and taking further steps to disengage from the settlements,” said Andersen, adding that if settlement construction continues, additional EU member states will publish similar warnings.

Spain and Italy issued the warnings to their citizens earlier on Friday. The foreign ministries of both countries announced that companies engaging in economic activity in the settlements would be making themselves vulnerable to a series of risks.

According to the announcements made by Spain and Italy, the European Union and its member states do not recognize Israeli rule in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, which were conquered in 1967, and regard the settlements as illegal in international law. For this reason, the announcements stated, private companies doing business, transferring funds, investing money, signing contracts, buying land or receiving tourist services from companies in the settlements would be taking legal and financial risks.

“The current situation could lead to disputes over land, water, quarries or natural resources that were acquired or in which money was invested,” read the statement from the Spanish Foreign Ministry. “Companies must take into account that [financial activity in the settlements] is liable to lead to their involvement in breaking international law and violating human rights.” Spanish Foreign Ministry officials told the Spanish news agency EFE that the warning was not a sanction or boycott of Israel — actions that the Spanish government opposes. They said that the warning was the implementation of a decision by the European Union and alignment with actions taken by Germany, France and the United Kingdom. “We have no intention of harming commerce or cooperation with Israel inside its internationally-recognized borders,” they said, referring to the 1967 lines.

EU institutions consider general warning: On Tuesday, the French government issued a similar warning, in which it warned against engaging in financial activity or investments in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and in the Golan Heights. A French diplomat said the warning was part of a joint act by the five largest countries in the European Union — Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain. ...

[Read the entire article here.](#)

16) [Boycott in the air](#)

Ha'aretz editorial, June 29, 2014

The winds of international boycott of the settlements are quickening, picking up. On Friday the Spanish and Italian governments warned citizens against conducting business with settlements in the Golan Heights, the West Bank or East Jerusalem, saying such activity could expose them to a number of legal and financial risks. France, Germany and Britain had previously issued similar warnings to their nationals.

The individual warnings by these five countries may soon become an all-European resolution. European Union institutions are considering the issue of a general warning on behalf of all 28 EU member states, and the statements by the five nations will presumably expedite these discussions. It was no coincidence that the EU envoy to Israel, Lars Faaborg-Anderson, said on Friday that the warnings indicate that EU member states "are losing their patience with concerns not being treated" by Israel.

For now, Europe is taking only small, measured steps. While the European Council last week took a firm stance last week in banning the import of goods from Crimea and the occupied city of Sevastopol, EU institutions have thus far made do with warnings only regarding the Israeli settlements. But the message is clear in the winds from Europe, and Israel cannot afford to ignore it. A European boycott of all economic activity originating would be a blow to the Israeli economy, nearly all of which is invested in the settlement enterprise, whether directly or indirectly.

The world is indeed beginning to lose its patience, as the EU envoy said. The status quo in the territories, which already has characteristics of an apartheid regime, is intolerable to the Europeans, who will not stand by indefinitely. After the last attempt to revive the peace talks, the collapse of which was largely due to Israel, friendly nations including Europe and the United States will be forced to take concrete measures against an intransigent Israel. In the 21st century, the world will not accept another 47 years of occupation, dispossession and widespread violation of the rights of an entire people.

The warning by these five states to their citizens should, therefore, become an even stronger warning to Israel's government: If it does not hasten to take concrete steps toward ending the occupation, all Israelis will pay the price, and it could be high indeed.