

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
October 2019



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

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- Churches for Middle East Peace wrote to President Trump outlining their recommendations for U.S. policies that would help bring about a just and lasting end to the conflict in Israel Palestine.
- Judy Maltz reports in *Haaretz* about a new survey showing that Arabs are more open to political cooperation with Jews than Jews are with Arabs.
- Bryan Bowman reports in *The Global Post* about a letter to Congress sent by dozens of U.S. progressive groups asking Congress to protect the right to boycott.
- *Reuters* reports that Palestinians in the Jordan Valley vowed to hold onto their land that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to annex.
- Sarah Algherbawi reports in *The Electronic Intifada* that Israeli snipers are stopping medics to reach wounded children at the border fence until it is too late.
- DeVos Threatens to Cut Funding for Middle Eastern Studies Programs for 'Portraying Islam Too Positively'

1) [Church Leaders Share Vision for Peace in Israel/Palestine; Condemn Annexation](#), Churches for Middle East Peace, September 17, 2019

On the heels of the Israeli election and with the U.S. Administration preparing to release the political component of its purported Peace Plan for Israel/Palestine, 22 Christian leaders, including Churches for Middle East Peace Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, wrote to the President outlining their recommendations for US policies that would help bring about a just and lasting end to the conflict in Israel Palestine.

In the letter, the leaders state 'a truly viable peace can only be achieved by lifting the Gaza blockade, by ending the Israeli occupation of territories captured in 1967, through the realization of Palestinian self-determination, the recognition of Jerusalem as a shared capital for Israelis and Palestinians and the recognition and fulfillment of the rights of Palestinian refugees. Such a peace can only be reached in consultation with leaders representing both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.'

The letter comes shortly after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's campaign promise to officially annex Area C as well all Israeli settlements in the West Bank, a move that would codify a policy of displacement utilized throughout over fifty years of Israeli military occupation. Such a unilateral move will irrevocably damage prospects for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Churches for Middle East Peace strongly condemns annexation of any Palestinian land. Annexation of even part of the West Bank would be a disaster for both Israelis and Palestinians. Palestinians would be left without any possibility of a viable state of their own, and neither people would be any safer or secure. We are deeply concerned by the United States Government's apparent support for these actions. We call on all Americans, especially America's Christians, to oppose this threat to peace in the Middle East and the continuity of the Christian presence there.

2) [Israel Election Results: Seventy-six Percent of Israeli Arabs Support Joining Ruling Coalition, Poll Shows](#), Judy Maltz, Haaretz, September 23, 2019

“In Israel, Arabs are more open to political cooperation with Jews than Jews are open to political cooperation with Arabs, a survey published on Sunday shows. The survey, conducted by the Guttman Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research at the Jerusalem-based Israel Democracy Institute, found that more than three out of every four Arab citizens (76 percent) were in favor of Arab parties joining the ruling coalition and their members serving as ministers in the government, but that nearly half of all Jewish citizens (49 percent) were resistant to the idea.”

3) [Dozens of US Progressive Groups Urge Congress to Protect Boycott Rights](#), Bryan Bowman, *The Global Post*, September 10, 2019

...“Dozens of progressive advocacy groups sent a letter to all members [of Congress] urging them to support a resolution that affirms Americans’ right to participate in political boycotts.

“The resolution is in response to growing attacks on the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement (BDS), a campaign that aims to pressure Israel to end its occupation of the Palestinian territories, among other demands.

“Win Without War, a group that advocates for a more progressive foreign policy, led the organizing effort to draft the letter, along with the Center for Constitutional Rights and the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights.

“The Jewish organizations If Not Now and Jewish Voice for Peace were among the 40 groups to sign the letter. The other organizations come from a diverse range of backgrounds, including Christian, Muslim, Native American, LGBTQ rights, environmentalist, and civil liberties groups.

“Boycotts have been central to dismantling systems of injustice both at home and abroad,” the organizations wrote, according to a copy of the letter provided to *The Globe Post*.” ...

4) [Palestinians Vow to 'Hold on to Our Land' in Wake of Netanyahu Annexation Pledge](#), Reuters, Haaretz, September 11, 2019

“Palestinians tilling the fertile Jordan Valley said on Wednesday they have been rooted for generations to the West Bank land that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to annex, and they vowed never to give it up. ‘We tell Netanyahu, and whoever follows him, you will not break the Palestinians’ will, you will never break our will, never, never,’ said Hassan Al-Abedi, a 55-year-old farmer who lives in the village of Jiftlik. ‘It’s our parents’ and grandparents’ land. We will hold onto it no matter what it costs.’ Drawing condemnation from Palestinian and other Arab leaders, Netanyahu announced on Tuesday that he plans to ‘apply Israeli sovereignty’ to the Jordan Valley and adjacent northern Dead Sea if he prevails in what is shaping up as a tough battle for re-election.”

5) [Israel shoots children, lets them bleed to death](#), Sarah Algherbawi *The Electronic Intifada*, September 20, 2019

“The parents of Ali al-Ashqar believe that Israel made it impossible for medics to treat their son. Abed Zagout Ali al-Ashqar had just thrown one stone when he was shot. The 17-year-old immediately fell to the ground. Nabil Masoud had been standing nearby. Along with two medics, he rushed to try and help Ali. ‘But the Israeli sniper started shooting toward anyone who got close to the child,’ said Masoud. ‘For around 17 minutes, no one was able to reach Ali. It was clear that the Israeli soldier wanted the child to bleed until he died. And that is what actually happened.’ Eventually, the medics gained access to Ali. But it was too late. An autopsy confirmed that he had been struck by a bullet in the chest, which had exited from his neck. He had also been hit by fragments of bullets fired in his direction. Ali was killed during the Great March of Return on 6 September. He was approximately 80 meters from the fence separating Gaza and Israel.” ...

“Almost 50 children have been killed by Israel during the Great March of Return. The Israeli government has implicitly admitted that snipers shoot to kill Gaza’s protesters, including children. During July 2018, Avigdor Lieberman, then Israel’s defense minister, labeled as ‘terrorists’ all those who had died in the Great March of Return until that point. The admission – perhaps inadvertent – is at complete odds with Israel’s boast that it has the world’s ‘most moral army.’” ...

“Ali al-Ashqar was one of two children killed by Israel on 6 September. The other child to die was Khalid al-Rabai, 14. Khalid had gone to the protests in Malaka – an area east of Gaza City ... Shortly after 5pm that day, Israeli forces fired live bullets at a group of protesters, which included Khalid.” ... Mahmoud Musallam, a medic, heard one protester cry for help as a child had fallen to the ground. “At the beginning, we were not able to reach the injured child because of the intensive gunfire,” Musallam said. ‘We had to wait for around 13 minutes until we could reach him.’ The medics hurriedly took Khalid away from the scene. He had been shot and had lost a considerable amount of blood. The medics checked to see if there were any signs of life but could not find any. “A child that weighed around 35 kilograms was shot with three bullets,” Musallam said. “And the shocking thing is that the Israelis prevented medics from reaching him. They wanted him to die.”

6) [DeVos Threatens to Cut Funding for Middle Eastern Studies Programs for 'Portraying Islam Too Positively,' Julia Conley, *Common Dreams*, September 22, 2019](#)

“Education Secretary Betsy DeVos called on University of North Carolina and Duke University to amend the curriculum of their joint Middle Eastern studies program, claiming it does not include enough positive material about religions other than Islam. Sunday marked a deadline for the University of North Carolina and Duke University to submit information to the Trump administration about the two schools' Consortium for Middle East Studies, after the Department of Education accused the joint program of biases against Christianity and Judaism. The DOE called on the schools to provide a list of events it is supporting during the school year and a full list of courses it's offering, claiming in a letter sent late last month that in the program, ‘there is a considerable emphasis placed on the understanding the positive aspects of Islam, while there is an absolute absence of any similar focus on the positive aspects of Christianity, Judaism, or any other religion or belief system in the Middle East.’ The program should emphasize ‘foreign language instruction and area studies advancing the security and economic stability of the United States,’ wrote the department. Critics denounced the demand by education secretary Betsy DeVos as part of President Donald Trump's Islamophobic agenda.

“The consortium teaches Middle Eastern languages, history, and geopolitics, and well as hosting community events focused on the majority-Muslim region's culture.

“DeVos opened an investigation into the program in June after it took part in a conference titled "Conflict Over Gaza: People, Politics and Possibilities," to determine if Duke and UNC had ‘misused’ any of the \$235,000 it received in federal grants under the Title VI program, to promote ‘radical anti-Israel bias.’” ...