



## **Abrahamamic Initiative on the Middle East**

*Grounded in Abrahamamic Theology*

Hon. David Price,

House of Representatives

Washington, DC. 20515

Dear Representative Price,

On behalf of our AIME delegation who met with you during the August recess, we want to thank you for the ongoing dialogue you have maintained with our faith and human rights leaders in an effort to bring about a just, secure and lasting peace for Palestinians and Israelis. In particular, we want to commend your efforts to support diplomacy with Iran, now being pursued by our Administration. Our expectations of the foreign policy leadership role you play, and your voice of moderation and pursuit of diplomatic initiatives we know are driven by your own faith and scholarship, and your writing on the institutional role of Congress.

We describe at the end of this letter AIME'S growing constituent outreach, education events and human rights initiatives that put our faith into practice. Our work, in response to your call at one of our earliest Middle East conversations, is to bring the moral voice of the faith community to our Middle East legislative work with its specific focus on the U.S. role in ending the Israeli Occupation. \*\*

It is with that voice that we want to share under separate cover, our current concern over legislation that would grant Israel its long sought Visa Waiver as part of the U.S. Israel Strategic Partnership Act, HR 938 that you co-sponsored.

At our August meeting, we laid out several concerns that must be addressed if the U.S. Administration is to broker a just and secure peace agreement. We understand Secretary of State, John Kerry, has allocated major energy and resources at the Department to resolving the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and ending the Occupation.

No agreement is possible, however:

- If all parties to the conflict are not at the negotiating table. To many Palestinians, Prime Minister Abbas lacks credibility and is beholden to Israel for supporting his government functionaries and security forces;
- If U.S. continues to allow illegal Israeli settlements to expand, and land grabs and Palestinian house demolitions to continue, including Israel's latest move to declare "closed military zones" that are established to confiscate Palestinian land and property;
- If the Gaza blockade and ensuing humanitarian crisis is allowed to continue;
- If violent acts by Israeli settlers against Palestinians go unpunished;
- If Israeli military abuse of Palestinians at checkpoints continues, and beating and jailing of Palestinian non-violent protestors continue;
- If Israel continues to choke off any opportunity for a Palestinian economy to thrive, as documented by the October 2, 2013 World Bank Report, "West Bank And Gaza: Area C and the future of the Palestinian Economy";

- If U.S. military aid continues (profiting U.S. military contractors), and the U.S. fails to use its aid as leverage against Israel's continued settlement expansion and human rights violations that are being driven by rabid right-wing settler violence, and the increasing role of these settlers in the Israeli military.

In light of current and previous U.S. Administration's failure to address Israel's nuclear weapons program, and Israel's failure to pursue Iran's proposal for a nuclear free zone in the Middle East, AIME has also challenged the continuation of U.S. punitive measures against Iran, especially with the installation of a new and more moderate President with whom our President (subsequent to our meeting) is negotiating, and who has proposed new protocols for Iran's nuclear energy program.

You acknowledged our concerns and asked for our ideas on what opportunities are open to you to pursue with Secretary of State John Kerry and congressional colleagues.

- We urged you to follow up on your 2012 letter to then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. Although many of our constituents despair of Congress honoring its own laws that you cited in your letter, and question Israel's real commitment to peace negotiations except as a delaying tactic while it expands its territory, we believe your continued pursuit of State Department action is critical, and certainly will continue to be part of AIME's legislative/education tool chest. Unlike his predecessor, John Kerry has made his role in brokering an end to the Israeli Palestinian conflict a top priority. Therefore, an updated letter from you, we hope would:

a/ reference AIME's disappointment at the failure of the State Department to address the questions you posed in your original letter;

b/ document continued human rights violations reported by respected international human rights organizations you also cited, as well as the World Bank report on economic conditions in Palestine cited above.

AIME members would be pleased to work with your staff in crafting such a letter.

- We suggested a legislative breakfast in DC, hosted by you and supportive Congress members, perhaps beginning with a planning meeting of legislative aides. We know that Amnesty International has provided an important tool kit on U.S. law, and proscriptions of aid to countries that practice human rights violations to Cong. Tom Lantos and the Congressional Human Rights Commission he chairs. We hope this information and a presentation by A.I. provides an opportunity for Congressional conversation, and will be discussed at our proposed legislative breakfast.
- The NC Regional Director of Amnesty International advises us that in April 2013, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly passed the Arms Trade Treaty that Secretary of State John Kerry signed but that has to be ratified by Congress – an uphill struggle we know. But we urge you use your good offices to support the Administration and press for ratification, perhaps with a Dear Colleague letter – a tool you have used in the past.

- The diplomatic initiatives with Iran and its new President have invited opposition. With your consistent support for a diplomatic response to the tensions with Iran, moving away from threats of war that persist, and the impact on civilians of the draconian economic sanctions, we think this is an opportune time for you to help generate support for the President's initiatives (again a "Dear Colleague" letter – drawing upon the support of colleagues who joined you in signing previous letters, and increasing support from an even wider circle.

We look forward to following up these proposals, and again thank you for continued dialogue.

Sincerely,

Miriam Thompson, Convener

Spencer Bradford, Solomon Barghouthi, Hank Elkins, Burhan Ghanayem, Emily and Ralph McCoy, Jerry Markatos, Peggy Rafferty, Kay Robert Wolkwijn

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\*\* AIME's current 2013 Action Portfolio

(see our website: [aimeproject.org](http://aimeproject.org))

AIME has dramatically increased its visibility this past year.

- AIME intervened in the free speech debate at the Chapel Hill Town Council meetings that was driven by the "End the Occupation" advertisements placed on the Town buses by the Church of Reconciliation's Salaam Shalom Committee and supported by Veterans for Peace, Chapel Hill Friends Meeting, Jews for a Just Peace, and Coalition for Peace With Justice. The Town was asked by some hostile voices in the community who opposed the ad's message and demanded their removal. Listening to the voices organized by the Church, AIME and allies, including the ACLU, the Town Council voted overwhelmingly to adopt a "limited public forum" bus policy that allowed the ad to continue, and confirmed the Town's commitment to the right of free speech, and to keep open the public square for dialogue and debate over social policy. The controversial initiative spurred months of media coverage and public conversation.
- AIME helped build upon the conversation provoked by the bus ads with a major forum on U.S. Military Aid to Israel, "The Quest for a Just Peace," held on April 14<sup>th</sup> at the UNC campus's FedEx Building's Global Education Center in which over 200 people participated;
- AIME has expanded its outreach to faith communities, and has established a local chapter in Oxford;
- We co-sponsored with other allies and help in organizing the "Breaking the Silence" book tour ([www.breakingthesilence.org](http://www.breakingthesilence.org)) throughout your congressional district and other parts of North Carolina. The tour featured Dana Golan, the former Israeli military officer and Executive Director of this organization of Israeli military veterans who oppose the Occupation;
- AIME was invited to join a meeting at the Duke Center for Human Rights with B'Tselem's Executive Director, who urged participants to work more vigorously with Congress to change unqualified support for Israel and its Occupation;
- Our expanded research driven by our own members, many of whom have traveled to Israel and Palestine, and research provided by national faith and human rights organizations – most recently

the research and tool kit provided by Amnesty International to Cong. Tom Lantos and the Congressional Human Rights Commission he chairs.

- Most prominent in our media outreach, is a series of meetings we have held with WRAL TV documentarian, journalist and producer, David Crabtree. Mr. Crabtree produced a broadcast on Muslims in North Carolina, followed by a panel discussion. He is currently planning a Spring 2014 visit to Palestine and Israel to tell the story of the Occupation's impact from voices rarely presented in the mainstream U.S. media.
- We are also seeking deepened partnerships with and support of human rights organizations including B'Tselem in Israeli and the U.S., and the Palestine Human Rights Center in Gaza.