

Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East

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An Independent Affiliate of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

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Dear Members and Friends:

As usual in the spring, most of our current efforts are in preparation for the upcoming General Assembly, this year to be held in Portland, Oregon. However, we continue to watch the Israeli/Palestinian situation. By the time of GA, Israel will have passed the 40-year mark of its illegal and immoral occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and of its oppression of the Palestinian people in those areas. Not a very happy anniversary.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY. From our perspective the most notable feature of this year's GA is the selection by the UUA and the GA Planning Committee of Professor Rashid Khalidi to deliver the Ware Lecture, an annual highlight of GA programming. As many of you know, Professor Khalidi is a leading Arab-American expert on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. His recent book, "The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood," published by Beacon Press, presents a history of the Palestinians and their unsuccessful struggle from the late 19th Century up to and including recent times (Don McInnes has read the book and reports it is very well written and extremely informative). Khalidi is Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University, and Director of the University's Middle East Institute. We salute the UUA and the Planning Committee for this choice, and we urge all our supporters at GA to attend the Ware Lecture on Saturday evening.

Because of Professor Khalidi's topic and outstanding qualifications, it seemed appropriate for us to take a different approach from our usual selection of programs. We will not have a speaker. Instead, we will show two films, followed by discussions. Our featured program will be "Encounter Point," a full length documentary film portraying the efforts of several Israeli Jews and several Palestinians, each of whom has suffered family losses or personal injury at the hands of the other side, to cast off their anger and to seek understanding and reconciliation with their "enemies." Presenting the film and leading the discussion will be the co-director, Julia Bacha.

Our other program will be a shorter DVD film produced by ICAHD, the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, showing an actual demolition, with ICAHD Coordinator Jeff Halper being carried out of the house by IDF soldiers only seconds before demolition begins. This program will be presented by Boston area Jewish activist Janice Hayden, who will lead the discussion following the film. Janice will also be selling Palestinian crafts in our booth.

Co-chairs: Samir Moukaddam, Atlanta, Georgia; Donald K. McInnes, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Secretary-Treasurer: Susan Nye, Watertown, Massachusetts

Chair Emeritus: Rev. David D. Van Strien, Peterborough, New Hampshire

We also call attention to relevant programs being presented by others. Rev. David Herndon, minister at the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh, and a UJME supporter, is presenting a 3-hour workshop for his ministerial colleagues a day or two prior to the beginning of GA, called "Peacemaking: Resources for Understanding the Conflict in Israel-Palestine." He will present and review resources for understanding the conflict, including books, videos, websites, drama and organizations. We wish Rev. Herndon well in this effort and hope he experiences a good turnout. We urge those of you who are ministers to attend.

Another event is a regular GA workshop being presented by the Ohio-Meadville District entitled "The Story of Rachel Corrie: Justice in Palestine." This is an original dramatic work written by a member of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh about the American activist Rachel Corrie, who was killed by an Israeli bulldozer while trying to prevent a house demolition in Gaza. There will be a discussion following the play. The play was performed publicly at the Pittsburgh Church in October 2006. Again, we are gratified by the inclusion of this work in the GA schedule, and hope for a sizeable and responsive audience.

The enclosed UJME ad, describing all of the above regular GA programs, will appear in the GA program book.

Four of our Board Members will attend GA, to staff our booth (Booth #448) and help with program arrangements. However, we can use and we welcome additional assistance at the booth. If you are attending GA and can help, please so indicate on the enclosed Invitation form and send it back to us. Thank you.

We hope that any and all of you who attend GA will stop at our booth and introduce yourself, whether or not you can help with the booth, and will attend some or all of the above events, and that you will urge others to do the same.

TRIP TO ISRAEL/PALESTINE. UJME is sponsoring a trip to Israel/Palestine for this coming October, to be led by our Co-chair, Don McInnes. The purpose of the trip is (1) to increase our knowledge of the conflict, and (2) to demonstrate our moral support for those working for a just and lasting peace. We are hoping for a group of at least eight people, up to a maximum of about 14 or 15. If you are possibly interested, please see the enclosed trip description and contact information for Don. Seven people have already expressed serious interest in joining the trip, and a few others have expressed lesser degrees of interest, even before this letter has been mailed out. Because the trip is filling up, anyone interested should contact Don promptly. This will be Don's fifth visit to the area. He promises that this will be a profound learning and emotional experience for all who participate.

CHAPTERS. More Chapters of UJME are gradually popping up, and older Chapters are growing. Since our fall 2006 letter, Rev. David Herndon, mentioned above, has formed a chapter in Pittsburgh, and incipient chapters in Peterborough and Keene, New Hampshire, have merged into one larger organization, The Monadnock Chapter, with co-leaders Jim Smart and David Van Strien. If you have an interest in starting a new chapter or strengthening an existing chapter, or if you think we can help in some way, please send us an email, or write a note on the enclosed Invitation form and mail it back.

THE SITUATION IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE.

Prospects for a meaningful peace in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict continue to be bleak. The recent increased involvement of Secretary Rice, the Arab League's confirmation of its 2002 peace offer, and more frequent meetings between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas are all welcome, but thus far Israel explicitly refuses to discuss any of the fundamental issues. The U.S. continues to pressure the oppressed Palestinians for concessions or to meet conditions, but applies no similar pressure on Israel, the party in long-standing violation of international law. The U.S. led anti-Hamas boycott of the Palestinian Authority is weakening the PA, while international aid flowing to NGO's is strengthening them. A withering Palestinian government cannot be in the interest of anyone, except possibly an Israel which has no interest in a peace agreement. With this background we will in early June start the 41st year of the illegal and immoral Israeli occupation. In addition, we are already in the 59th year of Israel's illegal and immoral denial of any and all responsibility for the Palestinian refugees. Even more unfortunately, it is the American government which makes possible Israel's intransigence.

DON IN THE DOGHOUSE. In our most recent newsletter (fall 2006) we proudly announced that we had then recently incorporated as a non-profit, and would soon apply to the IRS for approval under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, to result in the tax-deductibility of your donations. Guess what. Our esteemed (?) Co-chair, Don McInnes, has failed to complete the application, much less to submit it. Despite his contrition, he has quite appropriately been placed on probation, and now under this added pressure he promises to complete and submit the application immediately after filing his income tax return for 2005. He assures us this filing will be completed within a few weeks. Unfortunately, in the meantime your contributions continue not to be deductible. We ask for your understanding of this human failure, and hope that your support will continue.

SUPPORT FOR UJME. As always, we request your financial support. We need more contributors and more revenues to increase our presence at GA, to increase our activities more generally, and to increase our influence in working towards a just peace in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. We do not ask for more than one contribution per fiscal year, September 1 – August 31. Contributions are not tax deductible. A contribution form, entitled "Invitation," and a pre-addressed envelope are enclosed for your convenience. Thank you for your support and for your efforts towards a just peace.

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