

**DECEMBER 15, 2004 SESSION RESOLUTION**  
**WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, GULFPORT, MISSISSIPPI**  
**CONDEMNING ACTION OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL**  
**WITNESS POLICY AND DENOMINATIONAL STAFF OFFICERS FOR**  
**MEETING WITH TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, HEZBOLLAH**

Whereas, the Session of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Gulfport, Mississippi, being aggrieved of certain actions and conduct occurring during a Middle-East "fact finding" trip of twenty-two (22) members of the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy of the Presbyterian Church, (USA) and two salaried denominational staff members, wishes to express its public protest, outrage and condemnation of the reprehensible actions of those committee members and church staff; and

Whereas, the factual background and resultant conclusions upon which this resolution is based are as follows:

1. During the October, 2004 so-called "fact finding" trip in question, this advisory committee, with the full active support and participation of two salaried staff members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) chose to deliberately and consciously meet unilaterally with a known terrorist organization, Hezbollah.
2. Hezbollah is directly responsible for the willful terrorist killing of 241 United States Marines in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983, the hijacking of TWA flight 847 in 1985, the bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Argentina, resulting in 29 deaths in 1992, the bombing of a Jewish community center in 1994, killing another 95. It is sponsored by Iran and Syria.
3. Hezbollah has repeatedly engaged in other acts of terrorism including murder, kidnapping, bombing and other acts of violence against innocent citizens of the United States, Israel and other countries. A Hezbollah cell was responsible for taking hostage the Anglican Church envoy, Terry Waite, who was held for over five years before his release in 1991.
4. The actions of the members of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and its salaried denominational

staff members took place during a time of declared war by the government of the United States of America against terrorist organizations. This includes but is not limited to terrorist organizations identified with a particularly violent history of terrorism against the United States and its citizens, and a form of terrorism associated with radical fundamentalist Islamist factions, not representative of the peaceful religion of Islam. Included within those organizations is Hezbollah.

5. Hezbollah is a Lebanese terrorist organization. It is on the official list of foreign terrorist organizations as identified by the United States government. Among its stated objectives are the establishment of a Shiite theocracy in Lebanon, the destruction of Israel and the elimination of all Western influences from the Middle East. It has provided training and support to the Palestinian terrorist group HAMAS and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. It has been held responsible for attacks against mainly Jewish and US interests in Africa, Sweden, Denmark, Thailand, Argentina and the UK. As recently as December 2002, its leaders were urging Hezbollah to conduct a global suicide bombing campaign. The CIA and several news services have reported that it is clearly linked to al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. In 2000 a former U.S. soldier who pled guilty to conspiring with Osama bin Laden to bomb U.S. embassies in Africa stated that representatives of Hezbollah met with bin Laden in Sudan to plan the bombings.
6. The State of Israel is a country recognized by the United Nations, with a legitimate government enjoying diplomatic relationships with the United States and hundreds of other countries comprising the community of nations.
7. Israel is the only free, democratic nation in its geographic area. It's people are predominantly of the

Jewish religious faith, a people who have been oppressed and persecuted severely for their religious beliefs, and a people with whom we share a common biblical heritage (one also shared in part with Islam). It is totally surrounded by Arab autocratic countries with strong fundamentalist Islamic governments which have for many decades engaged in repeated acts of hostility and aggression against it.

8. The plight of the Palestinian people is real, serious and not to be minimized. There are also many Palestinian Christians. We recognize the inherent right of the Palestinian people to an independent state and to peaceful self rule, but within the context of peaceful negotiations according to international law through diplomatic activities conducted according to the principles recognized and followed by the community of nations within organized structures recognized by the international community and the governments of the United States and Israel.
9. Individuals purporting to represent the Palestinian people have repeatedly rejected efforts from the Israeli government to resolve the conflict and have continued to engage in acts of terrorism through Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations. This rejection continues even though the Israeli government, in negotiations brokered and participated in by the United States and other countries (the 2000 Camp David Accord), has offered autonomy, self-rule and a substantial amount of land to the Palestinians with which to form their own state. The rejected offer is believed to have included 97% of the disputed territories and half of Jerusalem. There is compelling evidence that Hezbollah and other organizations purporting to represent the interests of the Palestinian people are more desirous of destroying Israel and the presence of Jews in the Middle East than in helping the Palestinian people live peacefully with their Israeli neighbors.

10. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and its denominational staff officers are not professionally trained diplomats. They lack the skills, knowledge and experience to properly understand and participate in the delicate and difficult negotiations and international diplomacy necessary to make meaningful contributions to peace in the Middle East. Nor do they understand the past actions of the individuals with whom they meet or the historical context in which these actions take place. Indeed, they are neophytes who “see dimly” in such matters, far more dimly than the dedicated diplomats and officials of our country, of Israel and the international community. With all respect, these amateurs, at best, allowed themselves to be manipulated and used as partisan propaganda tools to further the interests of a terrorist organization and to lend legitimacy to murders and intolerant religious and political ideologues, or at worst, engaged in acts properly characterized as anti-Semitic.
11. The actions of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy and its salaried denominational staff officers have done great harm to the good relationship between the Christian community of faith and the Jewish community of faith in this country and throughout the world. These actions have also served to undermine the ability of moderate and reasonable people of faith in the Islamic community to work toward a fair and just solution to the conflict in the Middle East. We note with shock and sadness that one of the salaried denominational staff participating in this conduct held the high position of Deputy Executive Associate Director of the General Assembly Council. The former prestige and respect of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in this country, in the international community, and in the community of faith – Christian, Jewish and Islamic – has been severely tarnished by this action.

12. The aforesaid actions have occurred within the larger context of irrational and inappropriate action taken earlier this year by this denomination during its General Assembly. Commissioners voted to begin a process of economic divestment of invested assets in companies doing business with Israel. Yet, we took no action against acquiring or holding invested assets in companies doing business with terrorist states, states supporting terrorism, rogue nations and governments unwilling to comply with rules of the international community regarding nuclear proliferation, development of weapons of mass destruction and governments engaged in acts of extreme inhumanity to their own people and their neighbors. Thankfully, the General Assembly does not own the assets in question, and cannot direct their divestment. Those assets do not belong to the denomination, but are held in trust by the Presbyterian Foundation and the Pension Board, both of which have strongly acknowledged their fiduciary and legal duties to the donors. Those independent duties, existing both legally and ethically, preclude the General Assembly from tampering with the existing and sound investment strategies. We note that holdings of one of the companies criticized, Caterpillar, have increased in value by over \$500,000 since the General Assembly met.
13. This combination of denominational myopia, hypocrisy, arrogance and bigotry further erodes what little respect remains for our denomination and is decidedly unscriptural and un-Christian. This combination of actions has been properly described by many leading and respected Christians knowledgeable in such matters as an amateurish, reactionary, ill conceived, fundamentally flawed and dangerous approach to social justice issues and world peace efforts.
14. The aforesaid actions further support the conclusion of many scholars and experts in national and international

social justice issues that mainline Protestant churches, and the Presbyterian Church (USA) in particular, have fallen from their former lofty status as defining and representing the very nature, form and values of our great nation from the time of the founding fathers until and through the civil rights era. We and mainline churches are now, in most circles, considered to be, in the words of these respected scholars and experts, "irrelevant," and they probably are correct.

15. On November 12, 2004, officials at the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, Kentucky announced receipt of a handwritten anonymous letter threatening arson against Presbyterian churches in retaliation for "your anti-Israel and anti-Jewish attitudes." The letter promised violence against Presbyterian churches stating "they will go up in flames." It cannot be ascertained if the author of the letter was acting individually, on behalf of a group, was Jewish, or someone who is not Jewish but wanting to create strife and ill-will between this denomination and Jewish people or the State of Israel.
16. Acting swiftly and responsibly, the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, the Union for Reform Judaism and other Jewish organizations have condemned this threat letter in the strongest of terms.
17. No individual or organization has claimed responsibility for the letter. Since its issuance no acts of violence have taken place against Presbyterian churches.

In consideration of the foregoing, it is therefore

RESOLVED that the Session of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Gulfport, Mississippi, unanimously adopts this Resolution of Condemnation. It is further

RESOLVED, that this Session publicly protests, denounces, condemns and expresses outrage at the reprehensible actions of the members of the Advisory

Committee on Social Witness Policy and its salaried denominational staff who participated in the meeting with Hezbollah. Those actions are inappropriate, insensitive and horrible. Great harm has been done. It is further,

RESOLVED, that the subsequent public censure of these actions by the denomination and termination of the involved denominational staff members is to be commended. However this action alone is woefully insufficient. Rather, the denomination at its highest level is urged to issue formal apologies to the government of the State of Israel, to offended Jewish-American organizations, including the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Anti-Defamation League, to all people of Jewish faith, and to the moderate, peace loving Palestinians and persons of the Islamic faith whose interests in a peaceful and just resolution of the conflict were severely damaged by this irresponsible action. It is further,

RESOLVED, that this denomination is urged to immediately institute structural change to prevent recurrence of such actions in the future, including but not limited to adopting a policy of absolute prohibition against meeting with or engaging in dialogue with individuals, groups or organizations recognized by the United States government as being terrorists, terrorist organizations, terrorist states or supporting terrorist states. It is further

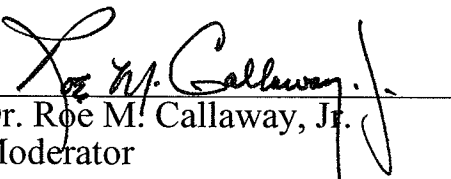
RESOLVED that this denomination is urged to immediately institute a policy to prevent its advisory committees, and any denominational committees, staff, employees or officers of the church from engaging in international "peace making" activities. We are neophytes and amateurs in such matters and should seek forgiveness for our sins of pride. No matter how well-intended, our denominational committees, staff, employees and officers are not properly trained, skilled or experienced in the diplomatic, political, cultural and other issues necessary to act responsibly and to avoid harm. We, as a denomination of individuals, see such matters very dimly. Our committees, staff and officers are no better qualified to engage in such actions than would be a non-physician in performing brain surgery, regardless of the seriousness of the patient's condition or the sincerity of our intentions. It is further

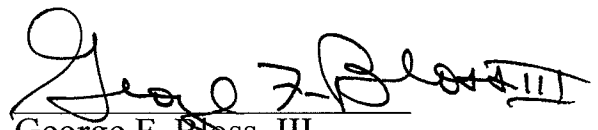
RESOLVED that, irrespective of whether this cry for denominational action is heeded, we, Westminster Presbyterian Church, as an individual church and as responsible members of the community of faith extend our deepest and most sincere apology to all Jewish people for the grave and reprehensible actions of our

denominational representatives involved in this incident and offer our assurance that those individuals and their actions and views are not representative of the general membership of the Presbyterian Church (USA). We pray that our heart-felt apology and call for institutional change will be acceptable to those people we have hurt and will be acceptable in the eyes of God. Forgive us, we pray, for we have sinned. It is further

RESOLVED that upon its adoption this Resolution be permanently spread upon the minutes of the Session, published in the church newsletter, and forwarded to the Moderator and Stated Clerk of the General Assembly and to the Moderator and Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Mississippi.

SO RESOLVED this the 15<sup>th</sup> day of December, A.D. 2004.

  
Dr. Roe M. Callaway, Jr.  
Moderator

  
George F. Bloss, III  
Clerk of Session