

Your Church Faces a Profound Moral Decision

Dear Parishioners, First Church Congregational, Cambridge, MA:

In March 2006, your Church rented office space to the Center for Palestine Human Rights (CPHR) with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of our organization, which includes working on the Somerville Divestment Project (SDP). (Turn this sheet over to see a brief explanation of what we are about.)

In late October 2006, we received this letter from Guy Stuart, Chairperson Buildings and Grounds Committee, and J Mary Luti, Senior Pastor:



"During the last five weeks, our office has been receiving numerous calls expressing concern about the nature and purpose of your organization. Some of these calls have come from individuals and organizations with whom we have important relationships. In order to maintain these relationships and address these concerns, our staff has expended unacceptable levels of time and energy. This is a distraction that we can no longer permit.

Therefore, we feel that we must ask you to vacate the space you are currently using in the building no later than November 15, 2006, and not to seek to renew your building use agreements with the Church."

We delivered a letter of response to Senior Pastor J. Mary Luti, along with samples of our literature; we asked for a chance to discuss our eviction and to respond to the unnamed sources who have caused us this problem. All we received were threats and curt notices to remove our office from the Church building, but this time giving us until the end of our rental agreement (December 31st). The Church leadership's apparent lack of skepticism about criticism (perhaps slander) leveled against us and their acquiescence to outside pressure for the sake of convenience are very troubling.

Most recently, the Church leadership threatened us with a demand to post on the SDP website an *explicit* statement saying that we oppose all violence in the Middle East: *"We expect the statement to appear within the current week. If it does not, we will act with deliberate speed to end your tenancy before the December 31 deadline of your current lease."* We refrain from such a general statement not only because we support self-defense, as did Mahatma Gandhi, but because we recognize the ruse of the aggressor: find ways to blame the victim, focus attention away from the source of the problem.

We in CPHR/SDP feel that decency and morality require us to be steadfast and outspoken in the face of ongoing, relentless human rights abuses towards Palestinians. We have always promoted alternatives to violence; we promote divestment, education, and adherence to international law and internationally recognized human rights. A wealthy and powerful Zionist opposition aggressively pressures US politicians (and others) to support Israel or risk losing power, being labeled anti-Semitic or, even more likely, having their chances of getting into office destroyed. Other countries consider US pro-Israeli policies to be racist and provocative. The Church's position can hardly be deemed 'unequivocally non-violent' when they dictate to CPHR/SDP what we must say on our website and if in turn they acquiesce to Zionists who – overtly and covertly – support Israeli abuses that human rights organizations have labeled crimes against humanity. CPHR works to shed light on the forces of darkness and on those who align with them.

We hope the Church's conduct in this matter concerns you enough to contact Church staff and let them know how you feel. Contact information is provided on the back of this letter.

Sincerely,

The Center for Palestinian Human Rights and the Somerville Divestment Project Board of Directors.

3 key facts CPHR wants the public to know:

1) Palestinians are the victims of 58 years of ethnic cleansing by Israel in its quest to make Palestine a Jews-only state. Israeli historian Ilan Pappé confronts this in his new book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.

2) As more people and institutions divest from Israel and from corporations that help Israel carry out its ethnic cleansing and brutality, the sooner internationally-recognized severe human rights abuses will end and the sooner Palestinian refugees will be allowed to return to their homes and live in equality and peace with Jews, just as they did in centuries past before the European Zionist movement formulated their designs on Palestine.

3) Our government's virtually unconditional support for Israel is the chief reason Israel is able to carry out its crimes. Jimmy Carter calls Israeli's policy "apartheid" in his new book, *Palestine Peace not Apartheid*.

Do most Americans understand what they contribute to? Do they know that annually over \$5 billion dollars of US taxpayer money helps to supply the weaponry that Israel uses to terrorize and massacre Palestinians? Most don't, due to Israeli filters that control what Americans know of the Middle East via mainstream media.

CPHR's purpose is to give Americans an understanding of the underlying cause of unrest in the Middle East, specifically Israel's:

- *apartheid wall* on the West Bank
- illegal settlements
- land grabs
- daily killings of innocent civilians
- uprooting of trees (a source of livelihood)
- house demolitions
- illegal detention of over 10,000 Palestinians, hundreds of them children
- use of torture
- targeted assassinations of Palestinian leaders, international rights workers and journalists
- confiscation of and denial to water resources

The issue of inhumanity and violence towards Palestinians is a profoundly moral one.

In a recent UN report, The Alliance of Civilizations, a cross-cultural group of 20 prominent world figures, calls for urgent efforts to heal the growing divide between Muslim and Western societies, the chief cause of which is the plight of the Palestinians. John Dugard, formerly a South African anti-apartheid leader and currently the Special Rapporteur on Palestine to the UN Human Rights Council, makes a compelling case that in many ways Israeli policies are *worse* than South Africa's were. On the Internet you can read his column *APARTHEID: Israelis Adopt What South Africa Dropped*, published on 11/29/06 as an op-ed piece in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

If you have questions about the work we do in CPHR and SDP, please feel free to contact us; we would be most happy to send you our literature. You're welcome to come to our free film series, *Unveiling Palestine*; we show a different documentary every first Thursday of the month.

Write to info@divestmentproject.org, and visit the SDP website for more info: divestmentproject.org

Write or call the Church:

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617-547-2724

General email address:

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Email addresses for Church staff:

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