

## Text of the letter from SDP/CPHR to church officials

Dear Church Officials,

We are writing on behalf of the Somerville Divestment Project and the Center for Palestinian Human Rights, which have since the spring of 2006 rented space in the basement of the First Church in Cambridge, Congregational.

This is in reply to a letter from senior minister J. Mary Luti dated October 10th, asking us to vacate our office space by November 15th. Her letter explains that the Church is being inconvenienced by phone calls from some who object to our group renting space at the Church, apparently because of the nature and purpose of our group.

We have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that the nature and purpose of our group are completely consistent with the values of the Congregational Church as well as with those of Jesus Christ.

For example, our group worked for two years and succeeded in getting 8 of the 11 Somerville Board of Aldermen (like city council) to co-sponsor a resolution opposing complicity in violent human rights violations and, in the same resolution, "opposing all attacks, by either Israelis or Palestinians, when civilian casualties are likely, whether the attacks are aggressive or retaliatory." This statement affirms our belief in the sanctity of all life regardless of ethnicity.

That was our work for 2 solid years (2004-2005)

The past year our main work has been to educate Americans about the legalized racial discrimination faced by Palestinian, Israel's violation of the Geneva Conventions (military occupation) and to use personal stories to educate people about the expulsion of Palestinians refugees from their homes.

One such story is that of our Board Member Leila Nabulsi, a local, 61 year old Palestinian woman who is a refugee. The UN Declaration of Human Rights establishes the minimum requirement for decent treatment of human beings on our planet, and it recognizes the rights of refugees as a fundamental human right.

In our main educational piece (see attached) we support the "right of all refugees, including Palestinian refugees, to return to their land of origin" we affirm this right of all 12 million refugees in the world (including 5 million Palestinian), regardless of ethnicity.

Our work is followed with hope at the national - even international - level. The position we have taken is endorsed overwhelmingly by both the Green Party of the United States, an organization that espouses Ten Key Values that include social justice and respect for diversity. It is also supported, overwhelmingly, by the 10,000 member Green-Rainbow Party of Massachusetts.

Our position on refugee rights has been affirmed by the UN over 130 times, each time nearly unanimously. The rights of refugees are a fundamental human right in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and are consistent with church values that recognize the sanctity of one's home as

well as social justice.

Our work is completely consistent with the values of social justice, many of us have worked in social justice movements for decades and were active with the anti-apartheid movements of the late 1980s.

In the United States, people who stand up for human rights for Palestinians are often called anti-Semitic, or even supporters of terrorism. We are neither. Accusations such as these are made by people who, for various reasons, oppose human rights for Palestinians, and create myths about our group in order to try to discredit our longstanding and clear social justice message.

There was a time when standing up for the civil rights of Negroes would make certain churches unpopular. Yet these churches held their ground. We believe that the values of a Christian Church require it to be a sanctuary for those who hold a social justice position based on basic morality and human rights even when those positions may not be popular with others.

We would hope that any church would stand for justice and human rights, and not waiver in the face of obstacles, much like Desmond Tutu who, in many people's minds, initiated the call for increased divestment, and who has not allowed the unpopularity of his decisions to alter his clear moral compass.

We would like at minimum a chance to set the record straight. We ask that you grant our Board of Directors, a meeting with those who make decisions at the highest church levels, at your earliest convenience (November fast approaches).

You will then be able to judge our character and hear our views directly. Please only then decide for yourself whether the First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, shares our deeply held concern for justice, peace, and the oppressed - as did Jesus. It is a concern that we hold deeply and it is a concern that allows us to go from thought to action. We would be happy to provide you with additional literature that explains what we do and why, just as we did before when we applied to rent office space.

We look forward to your reply,

Sincerely,

[Signed by SDP / CPHR 2006 Elected Board of Directors and Advisory Board]