

# Chicago Faith Coalition on Middle East

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April 13, 2009

Mr. Alexi Giannoulis  
Illinois State Treasurer  
219 Capitol Building  
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Mr. Giannoulis:

The Chicago Faith Coalition on Middle East Policy, consisting of Christian, Muslim and Jewish faith-based organizations and individuals from the Chicago area, calls on you to divest the \$10 million in Israeli bonds recently purchased by the State of Illinois. Directly and indirectly these bonds support Israel's illegal and immoral occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Also, we find it morally unacceptable for Illinois to invest in Israel in light of the horrific 22-day Israeli military assault on Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009.

It is doubtful that the close to 200 illegal Israeli settlements and outposts in the occupied territories, the massive infrastructure that sustains them, and the barrier Israel has built inside the West Bank and that the International Court of Justice has ruled illegal, could be maintained without the significant financial resources Israel receives from the United States. Proceeds from Israel Bonds go directly into the State of Israel Treasury, earmarked for infrastructure development and extraction of natural resources, most importantly water, from the occupied West Bank.

In Gaza, Israel's use of overwhelming force and of weapons that are prohibited by the Geneva Conventions have taken a terrible toll on the Palestinian population. According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights based in Gaza, 1,285 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were killed during the assault, including 895 civilians. Of these civilians, 280 were children and 111 women. Over 5,000 Palestinians were injured and maimed. Some 2,400 homes were destroyed along with hundreds of public, educational, religious and commercial buildings. At the same time three Israeli civilians and 11 Israeli soldiers were killed, four of them by "friendly fire."

The Israeli military also used weapons prohibited by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions in one of the most densely populated areas in the world. The Amnesty International report, "Fueling conflict: foreign arms supplies to Israel/Gaza," released on February 23, 2009, states: "Israeli forces used white phosphorus and other weapons supplied by the USA to carry out serious violations of international humanitarian law ...".

As people of faith, we are deeply committed to a peaceful and just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We support a resolution that will provide peace, security, and safety to Israelis and Palestinians and to all those living in the region. Middle East peace is also an essential U.S. interest, and we believe that peace can only be achieved when Israel ends its decades long military occupation so that Palestinians too can live in freedom and the process of healing and reconciliation can begin.

Given Israel's military occupation and its disproportionate use of force and use of prohibited weapons in its Gaza assault, the Chicago Faith Coalition on Middle East Policy believes the investment in Israel Bonds is intolerable and urges you as Treasurer of the State of Illinois to divest the \$10 million in Israeli bonds. We request a meeting with you to discuss this and will be following up on this matter.

Sincerely,

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Miryam Rashid  
Co-Convener, Chicago Faith Coalition on Middle East Policy  
American Friends Service Committee - Chicago  
Middle East Program Director

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The Rev. Dr. Larry L. Greenfield  
Executive Minister  
American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago  
Co-Convener, Chicago Faith Coalition on Middle East Policy

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Newland F. Smith  
Church Network for Education on Palestine

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Ed Thompson  
Project Manager, Chicago Faith Coalition on Middle East Policy

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Lynn Pollack  
Jewish Voice for Peace - Chicago

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The Rev. Cotton Fite, Ph.D.  
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Evanston