

Protestant Declaration Supports Israel and Persecuted Christians

Two persons with the Institute on Religion and Democracy were among the signers of a recent declaration from the Protestant Consultation on Israel and the Middle East (PCIME). IRD business manager Luke Moon and adjunct fellow Alan Wisdom joined 18 others who vowed to “stand with Israel and the Jewish people as we also stand with persecuted Christians and other minorities in the region.”

The declaration grew out of a November 5-8 meeting in Jerusalem bringing together leaders of pro-Israel groups in historic Protestant churches of Europe and North America.

“We are distressed to see how certain European and North American church officials approach the Israeli-Palestinian dispute as if it were a zero-sum game,” PCIME declared. “They fall in line with the international campaign that purports to help the Palestinians by delegitimizing Israel. They target Israel alone for boycott, divestment, and sanctions. This approach is unjust, and it is unhelpful to the cause of peace.”

The signers saw a connection between attacks on Israel and rising threats to Christian communities across the Middle East.

“The forces that refuse to tolerate the existence of a Jewish state are fiercely intolerant of other religious and ethnic minorities,” they said.

Meanwhile, officials of 15 church groups that challenged U.S. military aid to Israel have responded to Jewish organizations that had cancelled a scheduled interfaith meeting in protest.

A November letter from the 15 mostly old-line Protestant bodies expressed no regret over their original October 5 appeal demanding that U.S. support for the Jewish state be re-evaluated in light of "widespread Israeli human rights violations committed against Palestinians."

Instead, the church officials accepted the Jewish groups' suggestion of an interfaith summit focused on disagreements about U.S. policy towards Israel. The 15 church groups include the United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (.), and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Jewish groups include the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith, and rabbinical councils from all major branches of Judaism.

"This new declaration from PCIME is a refreshing alternative to the typical statements from old-line Protestant officials who blame Israel and Israel alone," IRD President Mark Tooley said. It reflects the fact that members of these historic Protestant churches take a much more balanced view of the Middle East than do their purported leaders.

"Indeed, surveys show that most U.S. church members sympathize with Israel as a fellow democratic, pluralistic state that is under attack from violent Islamist movements. They know that these are the same intolerant movements that are making life increasingly perilous for Christian communities across the region. PCIME models how Christians might constructively address conflicts in the Middle East."