

**PRESENTATION TO CONGRESSWOMAN BARBARA LEE
BAY AREA WOMEN IN BLACK
AUGUST 12, 2009**

Introduction

We appreciate this opportunity to meet with you and communicate with Congresswoman Lee.

We're here today because what the Israeli government is doing to the Palestinian people goes against everything we believe in terms of equity, justice, civil rights, and Jewish ethical standards. A people is being persecuted, oppressed, treated unfairly, and discriminated against with what we believe to be cruel and inhumane methods.

Women in Black is a world-wide grass-roots network of women committed to peace with justice and actively opposed to injustice, war, militarism and other forms of violence. It began in January, 1988, in Jerusalem, with a small group of Israeli and Palestinian women holding signs protesting the illegal occupation. BAWIB is one of three Women in Black groups in the Bay Area. We are Jews and allies, and our group stands in silent vigil, dressed in black, every Saturday from noon to 1 PM in front of the Grand Lake Theatre during the Oakland Farmers' Market. We distribute at least 100 copies of a one-page handout we prepare each week. The content is based on careful research and reflects what we believe to be the truth. We make a serious effort to keep the perspective educational—we believe the facts speak for themselves. The vast majority of the people with whom we interact thank us for what we do and agree with our positions. Many are surprised that Jews would be criticizing Israel. We take great care to distinguish between criticism of the Israeli government and criticism of the Israeli people, many of whom we know do not approve of their government's action. People in Oakland understand this distinction, if only from their own experiences in this country.

Because our government gives significant support to Israel, much of which is military aid, we're here to ask the Congresswoman to take several specific positions.

We want Congresswoman Lee to take effective action in support of the following matters:

- All U.S. Government efforts to end the blockade of Gaza
- President Obama's call for a freeze on the expansion of settlements
- The dismantling of all illegal settlements
- The elimination of the wall, checkpoints, bypass roads, and all measures that limit Palestinians' freedom of movement
- Ending U.S. military aid to Israel

Israel has been named as having the 4th most powerful military force on earth. The United States gives more military aid to the Israeli government than to any other government on the planet. Our substantial military support of Israel must stop. The Israeli government is committing crimes against the Palestinian people. Furthermore, Israel's use of arms against the Palestinians violates the U.S. Arms Export Control Act of 1976.

We believe that, by its support of the Israeli government and by providing military aid to Israel, the United States Government is supporting ethnic cleansing.

We deeply respect the Congresswoman and applaud the positions she's taken over the years. As the Congresswoman stood up in 2001 against militarism, we ask her to stand up now.

Presentations

We'd like to speak in a bit more detail to each of our requests. A copy of these presentations is attached and can be found in the binder we bring today for Congresswoman Lee. We first want to acknowledge that what you're about to hear is dense and can be overwhelming. Much of it is difficult to hear, including for us, but we're here because we believe in the importance of this information.

- The Gaza Blockade and Assault
- The Settlements
- The Israeli Fence/Wall
- Bypass Roads and Checkpoints
- Military Aid
- Racism and Ethnic Cleansing

Closing

Jews in this country have long been recognized as a target group. Despite major strides towards acceptance, anti-Semitism is sadly still alive throughout the world. We do not believe, however, that criticizing the actions of the Israeli government is inherently anti-Semitic. Rather, we believe it's our duty as ethical Jews to criticize immoral and inhuman acts regardless of who is committing them. The majority of American Jews have deep emotional ties to Israel which cause them to have great difficulty criticizing Israel. In fact, we find it particularly difficult to have conversations about these issues with other Jews, including our own family members, who do not share our perspective. While we may represent a minority voice in this country and among Jews, we passionately believe this voice needs to be heard, especially from Jews.

We also want the Congresswoman to know that, for many of us who are Jews, it has been only through a wrenching willingness to acknowledge the facts that we have come to our current opinions. Some of us have had to personally visit Israel/Palestine before we could believe what we were hearing and reading. But now, particularly as Jews, we are ashamed. We are ashamed of what "our people" are doing to another people. It's wrong. And, as U.S. citizens, we believe it is equally wrong for our government to be supporting that behavior. We ask that the Congresswoman please consider the facts on the ground: the way the Palestinian people are being treated, the violations of their most fundamental rights as human beings, the crazy-making nature of what they have to live with on a daily basis, and, most of all, the fact that it is horribly wrong for this great country of ours to be participating, through massive financial and political support, in such treatment. Bishop Desmond Tutu, who is this very day receiving a Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Obama, said, when visiting Israel/Palestine, "I've been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa."

We've brought examples of our weekly handouts. We would like you to share these with the Congresswoman, and we would like to have a follow-up meeting. We would very much like to know the Congresswoman's reaction to the things we've said and to hear any questions she might have.

INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS

THE GAZA BLOCKADE

The September 2000 outbreak of the second intifada led to an Israeli military blockade of the Gaza Strip. The economic and humanitarian effects were severe and worsened a year later when all entry and exit points were sealed. When Israel left Gaza in 2005, it retained complete control of movement of goods and people via air and sea and at border crossings, including the Egypt-Gaza crossing. In June 2007, Hamas forces defeated an Israeli-and-U.S.-backed coup attempt by Fatah militia. Israel responded by tightening the restrictions it had imposed on Gaza after the Hamas election victory in January 2006.

As a result, exports from Gaza were banned altogether and the entry of goods was reduced to a trickle--mostly humanitarian aid, foodstuff and medical supplies. Most other goods and many basic necessities became unavailable or in short supply, and a growing number of people suffered from malnutrition. A report by the International Red Cross warns of long-time ramifications on Gaza's malnourished children, including a reduced capacity to learn. Some 80% of the population became dependent on international aid for food, compared to 10% a decade earlier.

At the same time, the entry of fuel and electricity into Gaza was also restricted, with devastating consequences on the already crippled economy. Even before the December 2008 Israeli assault on Gaza, some 90% of Gaza's industry had shut down mainly due to shortages of fuel. The fuel shortage also had a grave impact on public health, sanitation and the environment, as water supplies, sewage treatment and solid waste disposal all require fuel. Untreated sewage had to be dumped into the Mediterranean Sea every day. Some 450,000 Gazans--30% of the population--were unable to access clean water. All this was prior to December 2008.

Since the end of its 22-day assault on Gaza, Israel has continued to restrict the entry of goods, using a list of banned items so restrictive that an entire truck shipment can be turned back if any banned item is included, such as: paper, almonds, chocolate, fabric, light bulbs, matches, musical instruments, clothing, crockery, books, sesame seeds, etc., none of which remotely relate to fabrication of rockets. According to the Israeli military, during the month of June 2009, a total of two home-made rockets were launched into Israel. Hamas has denied any involvement. Israel continues to cite the blockade as leverage for the release of the one Israeli soldier held captive by Hamas while its own prisons hold some 11,000 Palestinians.

Last month, a group of 38 U.N. agencies and NGOs called for "free and uninhibited access for all humanitarian assistance in accordance with international agreements and....universally recognized international human rights and humanitarian law standards." Now is the time for introduction of a House-of-Representatives' resolution calling for an end to Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip.

THE ASSAULT ON GAZA

Beginning December 27, 2008, Israel launched the start of its 22-day offensive in Gaza known as Operation Cast Lead. Its claimed objective was to put an end to the homemade rockets fired toward Israel by militants from the Gaza Strip. But the rockets not only continued—they multiplied.

The Israeli assault was horrific in its size and scope, causing severe damage, loss of life, and injury. One thousand five hundred and five Palestinians were subsequently murdered, the latest pulled from the rubble early last month. Among those were between three and four hundred children and more than one hundred women. More Palestinians were killed and more properties destroyed than in any previous Israeli assault.

Thousands were left homeless. Hundreds of businesses and public building were destroyed. Israeli forces repeatedly targeted ambulances and medical crews, killing several medical workers as they attempted to rescue the wounded and recover the dead.

During the operation, the borders of Gaza were kept sealed and therefore civilians could not flee. There was nowhere in Gaza where their safety could be guaranteed. And Israeli troops forced Palestinians civilians on several occasions to serve as human shields.

Six months later, Gazans still cannot rebuild their lives. Israel's military operation left thousands of homes partly or completely destroyed. Whole neighborhoods were turned into rubble. Schools, kindergartens, hospitals, and fire and ambulance stations were damaged by shelling. The fact that water and sanitation services could collapse at any moment raises the specter of a major public health crisis.

The weapons used, mostly on civilians, by Israel were manufactured here in the United States and were supplied to Israel by the U.S. Government. We believe this practice must end, as murdering civilians is immoral and is not consistent with American values. We believe the U.S. government should not only end military support to Israel but diplomatic support as well, which enables Israel to carry out these horrific acts against a virtually defenseless population in its ongoing campaign of ethnic cleansing. Martin Luther King, Jr., once wrote:

Cowardice asks the question: is it safe? Expediency asks the question: is it politic? Vanity asks the question: is it popular? But conscience asks the question: is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular; but one must take it because it is right.”

THE SETTLEMENTS

Jewish settlements have been an essential and emblematic part of the State of Israel since before its foundation in 1948. The European Zionists had been promised “a land without people for a people without land,” but when they arrived in Palestine after the Holocaust, they were faced with the fact of an existing and flourishing civilization, and then launched a campaign which is referred to in Arabic as “al-Nakba,” the disaster. In the words of David Ben-Gurion: *“We must use terror, assassination, intimidation, land confiscation, and the cutting of all social services to rid the Galilee of its Arab Population.”* More than 400 Palestinian villages were destroyed and their peoples murdered or exiled. Many of these villages were then occupied by Jewish settlers.

After the 1967 war, the UN passed Resolution 242, which called for “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict” as well as “respect...for every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries...” Despite this resolution, and in violation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which states “The occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies,” Israel began to build and populate Jewish-only settlements on captured territories. Some of these settlements begin as simple encampments on Palestinian land, eventually receiving government sanction as settlements or even “neighborhoods.”

There are currently around a half million Jewish Israelis living in Jewish-only settlements on Palestinian lands. Settlers receive monetary subsidies for migrating to Palestinian land. Settlements are often located on hilltops overlooking remaining Palestinian villages, usurping or polluting their aquifers. Settlers have become increasingly aggressive toward Palestinians, throwing their garbage down onto the villages, burning their crops, killing their animals, and even kidnapping their children.

These illegal settlements are the biggest obstacle to ending the illegal occupation. Since the 1993 Oslo Accords, the total number of settlers in the occupied territories has nearly doubled. And the U.S. has consistently vetoed U.N. resolutions calling on Israel to cease settlement activities.

Recent U.S. administrations, up to that of President Obama, have not characterized the settlements as illegal. But President Obama’s June address in Cairo to the Muslim world gingerly stated that “the U.S. does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements,” although he did not mention the fact that no Israeli settlements on occupied land are legitimate.

The increasing move to the right of the Israeli government and the constant increase in U.S. funding of these illegal activities makes what we are asking all the more challenging. The freeze in settlement expansion proposed by President Obama can only be implemented by the withholding of U.S. military aid to the Israeli government. We urge Congresswoman Lee to advocate for congressional withholding of Foreign Military Financing until the Administration assures Congress that Israel has complied with its previous pledges to halt settlement activities. Ultimately, we would like to see the settlements de-militarized and dismantled or occupied equally by all residents of the area, without respect to religion or ethnicity.

THE ISRAELI FENCE/WALL

Seemingly oblivious to its ongoing military actions against the Palestinians, the Israeli government, shortly after the stone-throwing incidents of the second intifada and the suicide-bombings in Israel proper, began building what they referred to as a “security fence” in the West Bank and around East Jerusalem. Begun in 2002, the barrier is partly a 10-foot wire fence with electronic sensors together with 330 foot-wide buffer zones, and the rest, a 25-foot concrete wall including 10-foot watch towers. Initially intended to run along the internationally recognized border between Israel and the West Bank, the barrier now envelops not only existing Israeli settlements but also their planned expansions, which include prime Palestinian agricultural land and water resources. In July, 2004, the International Court of Justice’s advisory resolution stated: “The wall severely impedes the rights of the Palestinian residents,” and declared it illegal where it departs from Israel’s recognized border.

As it exists now, the fence and wall prevent many Palestinians from getting to their fields and orchards, causing huge losses to those who depend on the produce for their living. In many cases, the wall completely surrounds homes and this means the residents have great difficulty getting to the homes of relatives or friends in the area. This has completely disrupted not only their social lives but their economic welfare as well. And, considering the more than 400 checkpoints in the West Bank, the barrier also affects the Palestinians getting to schools on time, to work, hospitals, etc., and has even caused the death of some who arrived too late at hospitals or were prevented from reaching hospitals. Also, the building of the fence/wall has often resulted in the demolition of Palestinian homes, and, in 2004-05 alone, more than 220 Palestinian homes were demolished in East Jerusalem. Another grave difficulty is the fact that a large number of settlers, whose homes are built on hills just above the Palestinian villages, are not above pouring their sewage and other waste down on these villages. This has resulted in very unhealthy conditions for the Palestinians. Added to this iniquity is the fact that the Israeli forces seem to see nothing wrong with such actions and little, if anything, has been done to stop them.

Given these conditions, it is not hard to understand why Palestinians fear that the fence/wall may become a *de facto* border, precluding establishment of a truly viable Palestinian state.

BYPASS ROADS, CHECKPOINTS, RESTRICTED MOVEMENT

When my husband goes to work in Concord, it takes him about 20 minutes from Oakland on California freeways. That is a distance of 17 miles. Americans take this for granted and so do the Israelis on THEIR highways. Maybe they even get there faster because they are the only ones allowed on their beautiful roads.

Sometimes Americans take the back roads when they are on a holiday. Palestinians have to take back roads all the time, as Israel restricts Palestinian's movements on a daily basis using Checkpoints and Bypass Roads to control their way of life. They are unable to move freely both in the West Bank and in Gaza. They aren't allowed to be in control of their own lives. Imagine what your life would be like if you never knew how long it would take to get from your home to your job, or your customers to your business, or to a hospital in time for the birth of your baby, or the emergency room in time to save your life or the life of a loved one. You would be in a survivor mode all the time. Palestinians have become refugees in their own country, victims of systematic discrimination and infringement on their basic rights.

In some ways, our history parallels that of modern Israel in its belief in expansion that is divinely ordained. Remember "Manifest Destiny" where we set our goals at becoming the biggest and the greatest nation in the world. We brought disease and alcohol to the Native Americans and basically took their culture and their country away from them. Then we imported slaves from Africa. Before World War II we turned the ships away that carried European Jews escaping from the Holocaust. Then we sent many of our Japanese citizens from the West Coast to live in horse stables before they were sent to internment camps.

The Israel-Palestine problem is a complex issue with no easy answers. One thing that might help us understand each other and commit to a peaceful solution is to remember what we have in common. Christians, Jews and Muslims are all descendants of Abraham.

A radical change is necessary between Israel and Palestine. As our Representative, we ask the Congresswoman to work with Congress to find solutions to this complicated situation. Our country should stop sending money to Israel that is used to support inhumane treatment of the Palestinians by buying bulldozers to destroy Palestinian homes and orchards. We are deeply concerned that, if we don't stop this situation, it could escalate into a wider conflict affecting the whole Middle East – and perhaps the whole world.

U.S. MILITARY AID TO ISRAEL

The US will give \$2.775 billion in military aid to Israel in FY 2010, an increase of \$225 million over this year's budget. This represents more than \$7 million per day. We are providing a direct subsidy to each Israeli worth *about* \$500 per year which is all the more striking when you consider that Israel is a wealthy industrial state with a per capita income roughly equal to South Korea or Spain.

By any measure, our government is giving Israel an automatic earmark and bailout. Israel is by far the largest recipient of US foreign aid since World War II. Over time, the US has been shifting the nature of aid to Israel to increased military support. By 2013 we will be sending Israel \$3.15 billion a year, or an average of \$8.6 million a day, and have agreed to provide that level of aid through 2018. Imagine what that money could do if given to support health care or education in our Congressional District 9!

74% of this aid must be spent to purchase US military goods and services. And unlike most recipients of military aid, Israel deals directly with US military contractors for almost all of its purchases. Thus, when Israel attacks Palestinians, its instruments of destruction are US fighter jets and attack helicopters, US missiles, US-made white phosphorous, US-made Caterpillar bulldozers. Israel's military offensive in Gaza was carried out with weapons, munitions and military equipment supplied by the US and paid for by US taxpayers' money. Our law prohibits aid to a country like Israel which engages in this pattern of violating international human rights laws.

Israel has the right to use the remaining 26% to purchase equipment from Israeli manufacturers, an entitlement not given to any other recipient of US military aid. Israel's arms industry has become one of the strongest in the world, recognized in 2007 as the 8th largest arms supplier to the developing world.

Israel is the first country in the Middle East to develop and acquire nuclear weapons. Our foreign aid law specifically prohibits US aid to nuclear states outside of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Iran has signed it; Israel has not.

The budget also calls for the US to respect Israeli claims on Jerusalem, in opposition to international law. The budget prohibits establishment of US offices, departments or agencies in East Jerusalem for conducting official government business with the Palestinian Authority, and stipulates that US officers should not meet representatives of the Palestinian Authority in Jerusalem. The budget imposes a boycott on the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, yet no conditions are placed on Israel for development of the peace process or recognition of an independent Palestinian State.

Our US tax dollars are subsidizing one of the most powerful – and brutal — foreign governments, providing over 18.5% of the overall Israeli defense budget. As the major supplier of weapons to Israel, the US has a particular obligation to stop any supply that contributes to gross violations of law and human rights.

RACISM AND ETHNIC CLEANSING

My first visit to Israel/Palestine was in 1982 with my mother. Although we were not religious Jews, I'd grown up with a sense of awe for the ideals of kibbutz life and the comfort of knowing there was a place where Jews were welcome. So for both of us it was a kind of pilgrimage. But we were immediately stunned and dismayed by the visual picture of racism that met us there. We knew virtually nothing at the time about the situation of the Palestinians, but we got the picture—people with darker skins worked in lower paying and more menial jobs. Professionals and executives all had lighter skins. This was true even among Jews. The face of racism was all too familiar to us, but we were taken totally by surprise to find it alive and well in Israel. And it still is alive today, only now the situation is so much worse. Now it's not just racism like we're used to seeing here. Now it's deliberate, systematic, officially sanctioned, wholesale mistreatment of a people. Now it is an explicit attempt to rid Israel of Palestinians, to prevent Palestinians from access to basic dignity and human rights, to collectively punish a group of people because of their racial/ethnic origin. What's happening there is racism taken to some of its ugliest extremes, and I believe without question that it can accurately be described as ethnic cleansing.

I revisited Israel/Palestine in 2005, this time for an International Woman in Black conference in East Jerusalem. While there, I spoke with a young woman from South Africa who had come to the West Bank for a few months to help escort Palestinian children to school so they wouldn't be stoned by nearby Israeli "settlers". She confirmed my own thoughts that the Palestinians are living in a state of apartheid. The Israeli government has created a systematic, widespread, and institutionalized disenfranchisement of a people. This is apartheid.

I am ashamed of what's happening in Israel. I am ashamed because I am a Jew, and it is Jews who are doing these awful things. I am ashamed because I am a United States citizen, and the United States is supporting the Israeli government. I am ashamed for what is being done to another group of human beings in my name.



Bay Area Women in Black respectfully asks that Congresswoman Barbara Lee insert the following language into the FY 2010 budget line-item for Foreign Military Financing to Israel:

AECA Violations

1. “No amounts appropriated under this bill shall be disbursed prior to the State Department transmitting to Members of Congress and making public the results of a complete, accurate, and transparent investigation into Israel’s possible violations of the Arms Export Control Act during “Operation Cast Lead,” as previously requested by Congress in January 2009.

Freeze on Expansion of Israeli Settlements

2. “Amounts appropriated under this bill shall be disbursed only in quarterly installments after the Administration delivers to Congress a report verifying that during the previous quarter Israel has fulfilled its commitments under the ‘road map’ and Annapolis Peace Conference to halt the building of new settlements in the Palestinian West Bank and East Jerusalem and to freeze the expansion of existing settlements in these areas, including so-called ‘natural growth’ of these settlement. Israel shall be ineligible to receive a quarterly installment of this appropriation if the President reports that Israel has undertaken any form of settlement expansion during the previous quarter.”

Ending the Blockade of Gaza

3. “No amounts appropriated under this bill shall be disbursed prior to the President certifying in a public, written report to Congress that Israel has ended its blockade of the Gaza Strip and that its borders are open to the free flow of humanitarian aid and for all normal economic transactions, including imports and exports of materials, and that all provisions of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access are being implemented. Amounts appropriated under this bill shall be disbursed thereafter only in quarterly installments after the Administration delivers to Congress a report verifying that during the previous quarter Israel has not reestablished its blockade of the Gaza Strip nor violated the terms of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.”