

Proposal for Organizing American Jews to End the Occupation

Submitted to J-UNITY Gathering May4-6 by:
Christie Balka, Marcia Freedman, Clare Kinberg,
Irena Klepfisz, Rabbi Rebecca Lilian, Gila Svirsky,
Donna Spiegelman

This strategy proposal for organizing North American Jews to demand an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem (WB, GS, and EJ) assumes that North American Jews, as individuals and through the organizations we are members of and that represent us, can exert a leveraging influence on the policies of the US and Israeli governments. Therefore, Jews who want to see a just peace in the Middle East must be presented with facts and culturally sensitive information which facilitate further organization and empowerment to voice their opinions and influence the North American Jewish community to demand an end to the occupation.

Though polls now show that at least half of American Jews supported "the peace process," which means that they have come to accept the eventuality of a Palestinian State in the occupied territories, they also fear for the safety of Jews in Israel, are wary of Palestinian intentions, and will never support any campaign they perceive to be "anti-Israel." North American Jews should be appealed to on the basis of their feelings for Israel, their conscience, and their sense of justice.

Our success in creating an organized Jewish voice against the occupation depends on American Jews actually receiving, discussing, and accepting the information disseminated by groups such as the Committee Against Home Demolitions, Rabbis for Human Rights, New Profile, Bat Shalom, Coalition of Women for a Just Peace, B'tselem and other peace groups which, on a daily basis, challenge Israeli militarism and actions in the Occupied Territories.

The Jewish activists at this gathering are part of an international movement to bring an end to Israeli control of land occupied in 1967. **Prioritizing the adoption of a strategy that will be effective in organizing North American Jews is critical for these reasons:**

- 1) North American Jews have a strong and proud tradition of fighting for civil rights and justice for others. As members of the Jewish community, we can find common ground with many Jews who feel rooted in that tradition. We believe that with the exchange of information based on our mutual passion for

and moral commitment to justice, we can make connections with these Jews about the need for Israel to end the occupation;

2) North American Jews need to become better educated about the very different effects of the years of the conflict on Palestinians and Israelis by being exposed to information gathered by established and respected international, Palestinian and Israeli sources. We believe this information will be most effectively conveyed by Jews and Palestinians who are active together or separately in their respective communities and who believe reconciliation is not only necessary but possible;

3) The support of American Jews is critical in pressuring the Israeli and US governments to adopt a policy of ending the occupation and actualizing of the other goals;

4) It is within reach to gather a critical mass of North American Jews in support of ending the occupation with justice for Palestinians and Israelis;

5) There needs to be a national network of Jewish activists whose primary focus is educating and organizing American Jews to this end.

ORGANIZING GOALS:

To bring a substantial percentage of North American Jews into vocal and material support for (a) Israeli withdrawal to pre-'67 War borders; (b) evacuation of all settlements; (c) full participation of women in the process of negotiations; (d) support for an independent Palestinian State; (e) the democratic rights of and equality for all Israeli citizens; (f) the creation of a non-militaristic culture in Israeli.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To promote an ongoing program of education for North American Jews that can be used throughout the North American Jewish community, including existing local organizations and congregations.

The education program should consist of:

(a) the harsh realities of the Israeli military occupation of the WB, GS and EJ including Palestinian daily life, collective punishments, curfews and sealing off of whole towns and cities, individual home demolitions and destruction of agricultural lands, health, education, the economy, and freedom of movement;

(b) the impact and implication of Jewish settlements in the OT including the continued building and expansion of such settlements, their locations in the OT, population statistics in relation to the Palestinian population as well the number of Israeli soldiers required to guard them, attitude and actions of the Jewish settlers to the local Palestinians, the network of roads which connects them and their impact on Palestinian movement and future autonomy;

(c) the moral and political need for Israel to end its occupation and to withdraw to the internationally accepted pre-'67 War borders;

(d) the need for the creation of a free and independent Palestinian state alongside Israel which will allow its citizens to live in peace and to pursue their own destiny;

(e) the various and ongoing protest activities and educational activities by Jewish and Palestinian Israelis and Palestinians in the OT, including the Committee Against Home Demolitions, Bat Shalom, Coalition of Women for a Just Peace, New Profile, and Rabbis for Human Rights;

(f) the anti-Arab pronouncements and violent activities by Jewish religious fundamentalists and settlers which continue to undermine any efforts for peace;

(g) the corrosive moral and material effect of decades of Israeli militarism on Israeli society;

(h) the reasons for the failure of the peace process up to this point and for Palestinians' rejection of the recent Israeli offer; this should include

information about the expansion of settlement building since Oslo, exclusive road work, the rise in Israeli economy and the fall in the Palestinian, etc.; and finally

(i) the need for international protection for Palestinians.

2. Popularize a vocabulary that:

emphasizes that Israeli security is linked directly to justice for Palestinians
connects Israel's future to the end of the occupation
envisions a safe and healthy future for Jews and Palestinians
pinpoints Jewish fundamentalism, the occupation and the Jewish settlements as among the primary obstacles to peace.

3. Resolutions from Jewish organizations, congregations and media calling for an evacuation of settlements, an end to the occupation, and establishment of a Palestinian State alongside Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders. Such a campaign for resolutions by committees, boards, organizations, and groups will be addressed to "the next level up:"

Individuals write to the board and leadership of the Jewish organizations they belong to; members of organizations and congregations form ad hoc groups of people who agree with the goal and first, work to educate the others members and the leadership of the local organization with the goal of achieving a resolution to be sent to "the next level up;" in their organization. If members of an ad hoc group of an organization or congregation can't achieve a resolution at the local level, send their resolution to the "next level up" in their organizations local, regional, or national structure and to the media.

4. Strengthen connections and relationships between North American Jews and Israeli and Palestinian organizations working for these goals.

TACTICS:

Objectives 1 and 2: Education program and popularizing a peace vocabulary:

a) speaking tours of activists in Israeli and NA peace organizations, singly or paired with Palestinians;

b) dissemination network for information about the occupation;

c) small meetings between "our" leaders and leaders of the mainstream Jewish communities in which we live, as well as elected officials;

- d) arranging for delegations of North American Jews to visit activists for peace and justice in Israel and in the OT and to dialogue with peace activists on both sides;
- e) local letter writing campaigns to government officials (local and national) and officials of Jewish institutions;
- f) op-ed pieces, letters-to-the editors in Jewish and non-Jewish media;
- g) demonstrations in which a vocabulary that emphasizes that Israeli security is linked directly to justice for Palestinians, etc.;
- (h) creating opportunities for American Jewish leaders who agree with the goals and objectives to speak and publish in local venues;
- i) dissemination and use of principles stated in Gush Shalom's working paper "80 Theses for a New Peace Camp" and the Israeli Coalition of Women for a Just Peace (CWJP) "Principles" which are both comprehensive and based on long experience.

"The Principles of the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace" are:

- an end to the occupation;
- the full involvement of women in negotiations for peace;
- establishment of the state of Palestine side by side with the state of Israel based on the 1967 borders;
- recognition of Jerusalem as the shared capital of two states;
- Israel must recognize its share of responsibility for the results of the 1948 war, and find a just solution for the Palestinian refugees;
- equality, inclusion and justice for Palestinian citizens of Israel;
- opposition to the militarism that permeates Israeli society;
- equal rights for women and for all residents of Israel;
- social and economic justice for all Israel's citizens;
- cultural, economic, and social integration of Israel into the region.

Objective 3: Resolutions calling for an end to the occupation:

- a) create sample draft resolutions;
- b) offer programmatic support (speakers, handouts, editorials) to members of Jewish organizations, congregations and communities who want to organize locally to achieve resolutions calling for an end to the occupation.

c) press releases on all resolutions and letters sent.

Objective 4: strengthening relationships between NA Jews and Israeli and Palestinian organizations. In addition to ways listed above:

a) fundraise for Israeli and Palestinian organizations

b) publicize all funds raised for Israeli and Palestinian organizations.