

*Church of the Brethren General Board Resolution*

## **Concern for Peace in the Middle East**

The Church of the Brethren General Board, meeting in Elgin, Illinois, February 19-22, 1975, is alarmed by the prospects of further violent conflict in the Middle East. As political aspirations, territorial claims, arms escalation, refugee rights and grievances, oil interests and divergent religious traditions converge, peace in the area appears to be suspended by a slender thread.

While components of the conflict embrace political, economic, military, and national rivalries, there is another major and often overlooked factor: the violation of fundamental human rights, needs and aspirations. As Christians we acknowledge God's concern for all people and that we are accountable for persons who are violated or in need. The Gospel is replete with concerns for peaceful relationships in communities and in the world. Jesus Christ revealed that peace is the will of God for all persons, groups and nations. Jesus called upon his followers to love their enemies and the Apostle Paul urged us to live at peace with all. Therefore, we reaffirm our belief that the use of violence to secure a solution in this conflict can only serve to breed further violence, i.e., war which is "incompatible with the spirit, example and teachings of Jesus Christ" (1970 Statement of the Church of the Brethren on War, Article III). While recognizing our limitations in fully perceiving the complexities and ambiguities pertinent to the Middle East conflict, we feel compelled to articulate our concerns on matters which are critical in modifying tensions in the area and moving toward a solution.

1. Territorial expansion by armed force can never be condoned. The violation of frontiers and of human rights in the Middle East must be condemned regardless of its label—terrorism or reprisal raids. All parties to the conflict need to recognize the rights and legitimate aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians to political independence and territorial integrity with effective international guarantees.

2. The suffering and injustices related to the displacement of Palestinian Arabs in the Middle East continue to be a major ingredient in the conflict. Lasting peace in the area cannot be achieved without a just solution to the refugee problem. This will require much patience, substantial funds, the cooperation of the international community and the Arab states, and especially the assumption of significant responsibility on the part of Israel and the Palestinians.

3. We reaffirm our long standing support of the United Nations (See: 1975 Annual Conference Resolutions; November, 1961, General Brotherhood Board Statement on the International Situation) and believe it is the best forum for the discussion of the Middle East conflict. This forum should be open not only to member states but

also to other interested parties to the Middle East conflict not adequately represented. Furthermore, we urge the Arab nations and Israel, including the Palestine Liberation Organization to resume negotiations in Geneva toward a peaceful solution of the Middle East conflict.

4. Because the escalating arms race in the area is an apparent and imminent danger to peace, we decry the unfortunate and dangerous trafficking in arms in the Middle East by many nations. We feel responsibility first of all, for the role of our nation in this regard and urge the termination of United States arms sales to, and arms or military training agreements with Middle Eastern states. We further urge our government to encourage or negotiate with other nations to do the same.

5. As a great power the United States bears major responsibility for contributing to a climate of peace in the Middle East. While we recognize and are grateful for the positive role that Secretary of State Kissinger has played since the October War to work toward the resolution of differences in the area, we view with alarm and deep regret the recent veiled threats by the Secretary (and confirmed by President Ford) of the use of force in the Middle East if "there's some actual strangulation of the industrialized world" (*Business Week*, January 13, 1975, page 69).

6. We recognize that free access for people of all religions to the 'holy places' in the Middle East must be guaranteed if enduring peace is to come to the region. It is our conviction that clear-cut arrangements through the United Nations or in some other appropriate manner must be made for international control or guaranteed free access to these areas.

7. Since the World Council of Churches provides a forum for various Christian traditions and serves as an instrument for reconciliation, we urge it to exercise all possible leadership in working for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East.

We note, finally, that our attention to these concerns issues not simply from a concern for the area which is the birthplace of the Christian Church but more primarily for the persons there who are being violated and because war threatens. Even as we pray for the peace of Jerusalem, we reaffirm our commitment of resources and persons to programs in the area which will serve human need and bring us to a more direct involvement with the aspirations and troubles of this segment of the human family.

*The General Board in session February 19-22, 1975, voted this resolution on the Middle East to be a Statement of the General Board and that communication be made to the groups to which we direct these concerns.*