

**Remarks to the Chicago Presbytery Assembly Meeting**  
**Gidon D. Remba**  
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I am Doni Remba, an Israeli-American Jewish peace activist and president of Chicago Peace Now, the local branch of Americans for Peace Now (APN for short). Earlier in life, I was a senior press officer to the prime minister of Israel. I served in this capacity during a remarkable time in Israel's history: from Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's groundbreaking visit to Jerusalem until the Camp David peace accords were signed in 1978, leading to the first peace treaty between Israel and an Arab state.

APN is a Jewish, Zionist organization dedicated to supporting and expanding the work of *Shalom Achshav*, Israel's Peace Now movement, the largest grassroots movement in Israel's history. Our objective is to help Israel achieve a comprehensive political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict that addresses legitimate Palestinian national aspirations for a viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian state living side by side with the Jewish state of Israel, with Jerusalem as an equitably shared capital, a peace agreement that is consistent with Israel's long-term security needs and its Jewish and democratic values.

At your last meeting, a representative of an organization called Jewish Voice for Peace claimed that a "silent majority" of American Jews supports divestment.

Are there Jews in America and Israel who support divestment? Of course there are. There are six million Jews in the United States. Nearly six million more in Israel. Fifteen million worldwide. In that population, you can probably find some number of folks who believe that someday the Cubs will win the world series.

Jewish Voice for Peace (or JVP) claims a membership of 30,000. But its financial statement, which is public under federal law, indicates a much smaller number. Not in my name, a Chicago group whose politics are close to JVP's, numbers in the low hundreds, and about half its members are non-Jews.

The tragedy in these number games is that Presbyterians may know little about a large and decidedly vocal and effective peace camp in the American and Israeli Jewish communities.

Americans for Peace Now is but one of these groups. Brit Tzedek v'Shalom: the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace is another. Both are large, national grassroots organizations working for a negotiated and just Palestinian-Israeli peace.

Additionally, there are a host of smaller American Jewish progressive groups, including those affiliated with the left-of-center Labor and the Meretz-Yahad parties in Israel, whose leadership spearheaded the Israeli side of the Geneva Initiative, the unofficial model peace treaty.

But one doesn't have to look only at single-issue Jewish peace groups. Our vision is shared by the Union for Reform Judaism, which encompasses 1.5 million reform Jews in more than 900 congregations, making it the largest Jewish organization in the world.

All of us are united on one additional thing: we strongly oppose the current divestment campaign because it is unreasonably one-sided, morally and historically inappropriate and, contrary to the claims of its proponents, decidedly not an effective strategy for achieving a just and peaceful resolution of the conflict.

As both Yossi Beilin, the chief Israeli architect of the Geneva Initiative, and Yariv Oppenheimer, director of Peace Now in Israel, have noted: divestment (whether phased and selective, or otherwise) is likely to generate anger and mistrust among Israeli Jews and drive many away from supporting the Israeli peace camp. And by alienating the overwhelming majority of American Jews, divestment places a great obstacle in the way of an alliance between the Presbyterian Church and the many progressive national American Jewish groups who are working together on a common strategy to promote a just Middle East peace.

For these reasons, I urge you to renounce the current divestment campaign and join in working with the many Jews who share your vision of peace and justice. Our agenda is large and multi-faceted. Among the most pressing challenges are:

- Making our voices heard in Washington urging our elected officials to use American power to demonstrate bold and sustained leadership to help Israel and the Palestinians transform the disengagement plan into a multi-stage de-occupation process encompassing not only all of Gaza but most of the West Bank, leading to negotiations to define final borders for a just and viable 2-state solution between Israel and Palestine.
- Speaking out to stop the growth of settlements in the West Bank, which by eroding a viable 2-state solution undermines the Palestinian public's confidence in President Abbas and in peacemaking.
- Working for greater U.S. and international support for an Israeli security barrier that is as close as possible to the Green Line (the 1967 border), placing as little Palestinian land as possible on the Israeli side, and causing the minimum hardship possible to ordinary Palestinians.
- Supporting direct U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority under President Abbas to improve the welfare of ordinary Palestinians and help bolster Palestinian moderates.
- Working for U.S. and international involvement in enhanced security cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians against terror attacks, to foster the peaceful and secure environment both peoples need to move forward towards reconciliation.
- Working to enlist international cooperation in finding a just and equitable resolution to the refugee problem, one that offers the refugees real hope for a better future and which remains consistent with a two-state solution.

As an ancient rabbi put it: "The day is short and the work is great." I invite you to join with us in undertaking this vital task.