

# Middle East Network Newsletter

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March 11, 2010

## **Jill Biden visits Augusta Victoria Hospital**

Dr. Jill Biden, spouse of the Vice President, visited the Lutheran Augusta Victoria Hospital on March 10 along with other members of the vice presidential delegation, which was in the region this week. She met with Dr. Tawfiq Nasser, CEO of the hospital, who thanked the U.S. people and the government for their support of the hospital. Dr. Biden visited the Radiotherapy Unit, the Kidney Dialysis Unit, and the Pediatric cancer care and kidney care unit where the children gave her a gift. She expressed thanks to Dr. Nasser and to the Rev. Mark Brown, Lutheran World Federation representative in Jerusalem, for the hospitality extended during the visit. For the complete story and a picture of Dr. Biden with children at the hospital, [click here](#).

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## **Churches for Middle East Peace Co-Sponsors Congressional Trip**

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) teamed up with the J Street Education Fund to sponsor a congressional delegation to Jordan, Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territory in February. While they did not visit Gaza, the group did receive a UN briefing on the situation there.

The delegation was thrust into the spotlight when Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon refused to meet with them. Jeremy Ben-Ami of J Street [commented](#), "This week's spat between the Ministry and our Delegation deepens concerns about the increasing inability of some in Israel and in the US to distinguish between criticism of or disagreement with Israeli policy and outright hostility to the state itself."

The group was able to hold meetings with many civic and political leaders and to tour Augusta Victoria Hospital.

Warren Clark, Executive Director of CMEP, [wrote](#) of hearing on the trip from those who, "spoke...of the urgent need to end this terrible conflict as soon as possible," and, on the other hand, of sensing "the feeling by some that the status quo in Israel is comfortable and there is little reason to undertake the short term costs of change."

The delegation was led by Representative Bill Delahunt (D-MA) and included representatives Lois Capps (D-CA), Donald Payne(D-NJ), Bob Filner(D-CA), and Mary Jo Kilroy (D-OH). Click [here](#) to listen to a CMEP conference call report on the trip.

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## **Save the Date: CMEP annual conference, Washington, DC, June 13-15, 2010**

Registration is now open for the CMEP annual advocacy conference to be held at the Kellogg Conference Hotel in Washington, DC, June 13-15, 2010 under the banner: Pursuing Peace Together: Working for Reconciliation in the Holy Land. Go to [www.cmep.org](http://www.cmep.org) to register today.

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## **Let Your Voice Be Heard: Sign CMEP petition on Gaza**

Senator John Kerry, Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, stated at a recent hearing on Middle East peace: "We must address the dire conditions in Gaza...Our grievance...is not with the people of Gaza...I believe there is a way to work with international organizations to get more construction material into Gaza in a way that empowers the Palestinian Authority and not Hamas, and that will help significantly, in my judgment, the peace process." Others at the hearing echoed the sentiment, including expert witness Dr. Robert Malley of the International Crisis Group, who called the Gaza situation, "a humanitarian, political crisis."

Churches for Middle East Peace, along with six other organizations, sent a letter to the President urging the administration to "use America's unique relationship with Israel to persuade it to lift the closure of its border crossing with Gaza now."

If you have not already done so, add your support to the letter to the President by [signing the CMEP petition](#).

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## **New resources for Peace Not Walls**

Detailed reports of background and actions taken at each churchwide assembly, 2005-9 <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Peace-Not-Walls/Background.aspx>

Expanded timeline <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Peace-Not-Walls/Background/Timeline.aspx>

Lenten resources at <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Peace-Not-Walls/Resources/Worship.aspx>

New page for Holy Land worship resources <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Peace-Not-Walls/Resources/Worship/Resources-From-Holy-Land.aspx>

Links to the ELCA Selective Purchasing Policy Guide (and developing a purchasing policy regarding the Middle East) at <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Peace-Not-Walls/Get-Involved.aspx>

And

<http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Peace-Not-Walls/What-We-Do/Our-Positions.aspx>

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## **Kairos Palestine Update**

"A moment of truth - A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering" also known as "Kairos Palestine" was launched at a gathering of Christian leaders in Bethlehem, December 11, 2009. The document is a word of hope to Palestinian Christians and a challenge for churches to work to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands as well as to re-examine theologies that support the Israeli occupation.

To encourage and facilitate discussion of this important initiative, resources are provided on the Peace Not Walls Web site [here](#).

The document provides both richly helpful and potentially controversial topics. It would be a mistake to assume that the Kairos authors want readers to focus only on any one particular issue from their statement, such as the call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions. Equally important is the call to American Christians to speak out against the realities of the occupation and to work faithfully to provide alternatives to American theologies that are used to legitimize the occupation and even "population transfer."

In the struggle to end the occupation, a variety of approaches has been and continues to be proposed. The ELCA aligns itself with and encourages non-violent actions and strategies which aim to weaken the systems propping up the occupation and which aim ultimately to end the occupation itself. The ELCA will continue to study the wide variety of strategies and be in consultation with other churches, ecumenical and interfaith groups, and organizations engaged in the struggle against the occupation.

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## **Israel adds West Bank sites to national heritage list**

Israel announced plans to include two West Bank sites, Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, in a national heritage plan. The inclusion of these sites has raised concern among Palestinians and others, given that the sites are located in occupied Palestinian territory. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as reported by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, insisted that "We will maintain the existing status quo," and "We are not determining anything new." However, Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, as reported in Haaretz, saw the situation differently, claiming that the "unilateral decision to make Palestinian sites in Hebron and Bethlehem part of Israel shows there is no genuine partner for peace, but an occupying power intent on consolidating Palestinian lands."

For more, see:

[\*\*UNESCO \(United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization\) Director General expresses concern about Tomb of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb.\*\*](#)

[\*\*Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's remarks\*\*](#)

[The views of the Palestinian Authority cabinet](#)

["UN: Israel 'heritage sites' are on Palestinian land," Haaretz, 2/22/2010](#)



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
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