

Faith-based communities provide fertile ground for boycott movement

Feb 07, 2012 09:59 am | Susan Landau



Martin Luther King Jr

Last Saturday at the Penn BDS Conference, Susan Landau moderated a panel of religious speakers who are supporting boycott and divestment. Here are her opening and closing remarks.

INTRODUCTION.

The road to equality and justice is well lit by people of faith. Conversely, the world of oppression and injustice is well maintained by other people of faith. For the purpose of this panel discussion, the term faith-based communities will refer to the former.

Our various ethical traditions are concerned with how we live, how we treat other people, and how to promote a more just world. Communities of faith find common ground in their shared commitment to ethical action.

Religion speaks in the language of faith, hope, peace and love. The political equivalent is a framework of non-violence, universal human rights, international law, and social responsibility. This makes BDS is a sensible, tested, and unambiguous response for people of faith to Israeli apartheid, injustice, and occupation.

The 2005 BDS Call is from Palestinian civil society to people of conscience in the international community. Of course faith-based communities answer the Call.

Analogous to the role of the church in the civil rights, anti-war, and anti-Apartheid movement, BDS provides an aspirational and actionable agenda for faith-based communities. As respected community structures, churches, synagogues, and mosques are positioned to help lead this movement by opening spaces to host conversations, schedule educational events, sponsor missions, and organize political actions.

It's helpful to ground today's panel discussion by reflecting on past and present trailblazers of faith-based organizing:

- Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s commitment to civil rights through the tactic of non-violent resistance had a seismic impact that forever changed the landscape of American society.
- American Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel interpreted the teachings of the Hebrew prophets as a clarion call for social action. Advocating for civil rights and against the Vietnam War, Heschel described his experience supporting Reverend Martin Luther King by saying "When I marched in Selma, my legs were praying."
- The Rev. Dr. Naim Stifan Ateek a Palestinian Christian, is founder and head of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem.
- Archbishop Elias Chacour teaches reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. He is a "Palestinian-Arab-Christian-Israeli, and vice president of the Sabeel Center.

and

- The bedrock of the moral universe for the BDS movement and uncontested champion for justice, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who continues to bring the lessons from South Africa to the struggle against Israeli apartheid.

Here in Philadelphia, local clergy move this work forward, including: Retired Episcopal Bishop Allen Bartlett, Rev. Cliff Cutler, Rev. Judith Beck, and longtime advocate for justice, Rev Isaac Miller. Pushing the envelope by courageously speaking out for justice in Israel-Palestine are Rabbis Brian Walt, Linda Holtzman and Alissa Wise. Yet successful faith-based organizing would not be possible without all of the ordinary and extraordinary people whose names we rarely know.

Now to our panelists - -all of whom are trailblazers and co-travelers on this path. You honor us with your work and presence today. We welcome: Reverend Graylan Haglar, Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, , Cyrus McGoldrik, and Natalia Cuadra-Saez.

CLOSING

From the jail in Birmingham, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. spelled out his theory of non-violence: "Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue." Let's keep making it happen!