**Peace Not Walls Update**

September 2013

**This Thursday, Sept. 19, tell your Members of Congress in person or in writing that you oppose ongoing Israeli settlement expansion and believe it to be one of the most important issues threatening a negotiated, just peace.**

**Third Thursday Action Alert**

*Peace Not Walls, along with other organizations in the Faith Forum on Middle East Policy, will send out action alerts monthly on every third Thursday. Each action alert will focus on different issues so that members of Congress hear consistently that their constituents support a just and lasting negotiated resolution to the Palestinian Israeli conflict. This is the second of these monthly alerts.*

**A negotiated, just peace threatened by settlement expansion**

In recent weeks a great deal of attention has been paid to the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has expressed his hope that these talks will finally break past cycles of failure and will instead result in an agreement that ends the conflict. Nonetheless, significant changes in the assumptions and preconditions that have governed the failed negotiations of the last 20 years will be required for a different and more successful outcome. While we remain focused on long-term solutions and negotiations, we as a church also hear the urgent voices of our companions in the region calling for changes that are necessary now to alleviate basic human suffering. As a church, the ELCA stands for the flourishing of human community and against those actions that diminish human dignity. Israel’s ongoing illegal confiscation of land, property and resources from Palestinians, including the rapid expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, is robbing Palestinians of their houses, land and security as well as the hope of a secure, viable Palestinian state.

Even while preparing and engaging in peace talks, Israel continues its settlement expansion. In late July Israel released its list of “National Priority Communities” which are communities entitled to special government funding. A number of new settlements were added to the list raising the total number of [settlements that are eligible for these benefits to 90](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4413457,00.html). The communities added to the list included four settlement outposts which were built without legal approval from the Israeli government on land stolen from Palestinians. This decision effectively “legalizes” four new settlements, opening the way for their continued expansion and foreclosing any chance that they will be removed in the near future.

On Aug. 8 the Israeli government also approved the construction of [more than 800 new housing units](http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.540481) in settlements throughout the West Bank. Many of the new units were approved in settlements located near Nablus and Hebron and in the Jordan Valley. These are locations deep in the West Bank and the continued presence of settlements in these areas precludes the possibility of a negotiated two-state solution. On Aug. 10 the Israeli government also issued tenders for the building of [1,187 new housing units](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/12/world/middleeast/israeli-housing-plan-adds-to-tension-ahead-of-talks.html?ref=middleeast&pagewanted=all) in West Bank settlements.

Settlements are not a secondary issue but rather are at the core of the conflict. They are illegally built on occupied land, are one of the core justifications for the building of the wall and the restriction of movement within the West Bank, contribute to forced displacement, severely limit Palestinian access to basic resources including land and water, and perpetuate a system of segregation and legal and structural inequality between Palestinians and Israelis.

The U.S. government and international community officially oppose Israel’s settlement policy and hold that all Israeli settlements are illegal. However, Israel faces no consequences from the US for continuing to build settlements in defiance of international law and U.S. policy. If the U.S. is serious about achieving a just and lasting peace in Palestine and Israel it should [follow the lead of the European U](http://972mag.com/why-the-eu-shouldnt-amend-its-new-settlement-guidelines/77263/)nion by putting in place consequences for continued settlement activity.

Send your representatives a letter to let them know you oppose ongoing Israeli settlement expansion and believe it to be one of the most important issues threatening a negotiated, just peace. Express to them your demand that the U.S. follow through on its policy statements, uphold international law and put in place consequences for Israel if it continues its settlement activities.

Subject: Stop continued Israeli settlement expansion

Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to express my concern about ongoing Israeli settlement expansion.

Even while U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, is working hard to push forward peace talks, Israel has chosen to continue to flagrantly defy U.S. policies that oppose all settlement construction. On Aug. 8 the Israeli government approved the construction of over 800 new housing units in settlements throughout the West Bank. Many of the new units were approved in settlements located near Nablus and Hebron and in the Jordan Valley. These are locations deep in the West Bank and the continued presence of settlements in these areas precludes the possibility of a negotiated two-state solution. On Aug. 10 the Israeli government also issued tenders for the building of an additional 1,187 new housing units in Jerusalem and West Bank settlements. These actions violate international law and run directly counter to U.S. policies and interests in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

Israel must be held to account for these actions.

The U.S. government has repeatedly made clear its opposition to Israel’s continued settlement policy and recognizes the illegality of all Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. However, to date the U.S. has taken no steps to pressure Israel to stop building and expanding settlements.

This must change.

I therefore ask that you both demand an end to Israeli settlement activity and:

1. Develop new U.S. policies that replicate the recently released [European Union Guidelines](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2013:205:0009:0011:EN:PDF) on assistance to Israel that ban the provision of grants, prizes and funding to all Israeli entities operating in the occupied Palestinian territory and the Golan Heights, and that reiterate U.S. policy that Israeli sovereignty extends only up to Israel’s pre-1967 borders.
2. Enforce a labeling system for items produced in Israeli settlements to distinguish settlement products from goods produced within Israel’s pre-1967 borders. Settlement goods should also be excluded from all preferential trade agreements signed between the United States and Israel.
3. Withhold all government assistance to Israel until the Israeli government halts all settlement activities in the West Bank including East Jerusalem.

Israel must know that it cannot continue to take actions that both violate international law and foreclose the possibility of peace without incurring a cost.

Sincerely,