

INTERFAITH PEACE-BUILDERS

Spring 2007 Newsletter:

Focus on Education and Advocacy

Delegations to Israel/Palestine only are the first step!

Our delegations are designed to give participants first-hand experience in Israel/Palestine and inspire action when they return home. We ask prospective delegates not only why they want to join a delegation, but also if they are willing to make a *political commitment to educate others* after the delegation. This education component can (and needs to!) take many forms—as delegates utilize their unique skills and contacts to educate others about the struggle for peace with justice in Israel/Palestine and advocate for better US foreign policy on these crucial issues.

In this newsletter we want to focus on the many exciting ways that delegates engage their local communities after returning from a delegation.

In the past year, IFPB delegates and board members have been published in the ***New York Times***, the ***Washington Post***, and the ***Chicago Tribune***. Online articles have appeared in ***The Nation***, ***Counterpunch***, and ***Electronic Intifada***. Several local **NPR stations** have featured interviews with delegates ranging from 10 minutes to hour-long segments. Interviews with delegates have also aired on **Radio Free Georgia** in Atlanta and **Radio Islam** in Chicago.

Legislative work has included many **meetings with Congressional staffers** and letters to their offices on important issues. We took an important step in advancing this work in February when 10 IFPB delegates met in Washington, DC, for a **day of training and lobbying** organized for them by the American Friends Service Committee.



Delegates have *presented* their work, insight, and opinions in a variety of ways. Traditional presentations (speeches, slideshows, etc) remain a popular and effective way to reach out to local groups. Delegates have spoken to **Rotary Clubs**, **World Affairs Councils**, **local peace groups**, and within numerous **religious communities**. Audiences at eight **colleges and universities**, the **Middle East Studies Association**, and several **high schools** have learned from former IFPB delegates.

Other delegates share through their art: a **photo exhibit** of pictures from Israel/Palestine, a fabric artist's entry in the **Palestine Center's "Jerusalem: Between Visions and Realities,"** and a project to combine **words and photos from Palestinian children** in Dheisheh refugee camp are some of the ways that delegates have incorporated the experience in their art.

In all of these ways—and many more—delegates are hard at work using their experience from IFPB's trips to Israel/Palestine.



The Background: Goals and Structure of Education and Advocacy

From its inception the Interfaith Peace-Builders program was determined to address one of the perennial weaknesses of delegation programs by **planning to support delegates when they return**. This component sets IFPB apart from most other delegation programs.

Interfaith Peace-Builders developed its Education and Advocacy Program to help build coordinated and connected efforts in the US to educate people about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and work for a just, sustainable solution. IFPB is committed to creating connections among delegates that foster effective educational and advocacy work, support for individuals and organizations, and leadership at the local, regional, and national levels.

The Education and Advocacy Network is an ambitious and vital effort to change the dynamics of conversation and action around Israel/Palestine in this country. It is the component of IFPB's work that has the greatest potential and need for growth and expansion.

Features of the IFPB Education and Advocacy Program

- **Outreach and Publicity during the Delegation.** We send trip reports and photos during each delegation; these reports reach several thousand people, including the members of our email network and the family and friends of the delegates. As a result, each set of reports

reaches a broad *new audience* that may know very little about the conflict.

- **Media Outreach.** We assist delegates in researching local media, writing press releases, and setting up media contacts—generating considerable success in newspaper coverage, radio interviews, and interviews on community cable channels.
- **Support for Delegates.** When delegates return to the US, we help them connect to each other, to us, and to local and national groups. Our booklet, *Making the Most of Your Delegation Experience*, provides advice, guidelines, and training in organizing and sustaining their work. We also facilitate ongoing phone and email contact as support networks.
- **Congressional Relations and Advocacy.** Congressional work on Israel/Palestine is one of the most difficult and crucial pieces of our work. We encourage delegates to meet with their congressional representatives when they return. We are also building collaborative work with several organizations on congressional action alerts and lobbying efforts.

Two view-altering weeks in the Middle East

CITY OF TONAWANDA: A local man experiences Middle Eastern violence up-close.

BY ERIC O'CONNOR
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When Bill Wolski signed up for a trip to the Holy Land, he wasn't expecting a Biblical stoning.

Wolski, a City of Tonawanda resident, took a keen interest in the Middle East after the events of Sept. 11, 2001. While online a few months ago, he came across a two-week program called the Interfaith Peace-Builders delegation that sends U.S. citizens to Israel and the West Bank. The program is operated by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group.

Bill Wolski
Worked in the Middle East



of the Palestinian people, and this trip really solidified my views," Wolski said. "It's made me more conscious of human rights."

"This has really made Christianity relevant to me again. I'm originally a Catholic, and if I'm going to be a practicing Christian, I need to speak out against this."

Wolski now hopes to spread a clearer picture of the conflict in the Middle East. Of course, there are atrocities on both sides — Israeli and Palestinian — but atrocities perpetrated by the Israeli people are grossly underrepresented, he said.

Wolski was caught in what was apparently a daily ritual near Israeli settlements in the West Bank — the stoning of Palestinians by Israeli children.

"We all had to scramble for cover. You get a little fearful when you see rocks the size of grapefruits raining down," he said. "And the joke was, let's turn on FOX News because they're so fair and balanced. They only seem to show Palestinian violence."

Wolski, who works as a principal with the engineering firm Synergy Solutions, was part of FOR's 14th delegation. Since 2001, FOR has guided about 150 people through the Middle East. The participants have to pay their own way, but FOR sets up the itinerary.

FOR began 91 years ago as an organization for peace. Its first project was a grass roots

effort to end World War I. One of the group's current political stances is an oppositional view toward Israeli settlements on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"The goal is to take groups of U.S. citizens over there to talk to non-violent activists from both sides of the conflict," said Mike Daly, the program's coordinator. "The ultimate goal is influencing policy first in the local community and, ultimately, public policy."

Wolski said the trip was not about politics for him, however. "This trip was so apolitical," he said. "I don't really care about politics. My concerns are as a taxpayer and as a U.S. citizen, that there are human rights violations that are subsidized by my government."

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A Sampling of IFPB Delegates' Ongoing Work

Media Highlights

- "Oh Little Ghetto of Bethlehem" published in the *Chicago Tribune* on December 24, 2006
- Several letters to the editors published in both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.
- Articles in online editions of *The Nation*, *Counterpunch*, and *Electronic Intifada* by IFPB board member Michael Brown.
- Letter to the editor in the *Economist* (UK) critiquing their coverage of the summer war in Lebanon and Israel.
- Series of articles from southern Lebanon published in summer 2006 by former delegates.
- Coverage of IFPB board member Scott Kennedy's visit to Gaza picked up by *Reuters*, *Yahoo News*, *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem), and the *American Muslim*.
- West Virginia Public Radio aired a nine-minute interview with two summer 2006 delegates.
- Hour-long radio interview on Radio Free Georgia with IFPB delegation leaders.
- Radio interview with Radio Islam in Chicago of a Muslim, Christian, and Jewish participant on November 2006 delegation.
- NPR's *Morning Edition* read a letter on-air from a delegate encouraging better NPR coverage on the summer war.
- Israeli television interviewed members of the July 2006 delegation at a Women in Black demonstration in Jerusalem.
- In total, over 100 media activities in the past year alone, including the above, articles in smaller local papers, other radio interviews, and meetings with editorial boards.

Presentations, Organizing, and Other Work

- Many delegates organized and joined demonstrations protesting Israel's war with Lebanon in the summer of 2006.
- Delegates organized many film showings, including "The Iron Wall" and "Paradise Now."
- Staff and delegates helped to plan and moderate a panel on the divestment issue with two Presbyterian General Assembly Commissioners.
- Delegates gave many sermons at churches, mosques, and synagogues, including ones in San Francisco, the DC area, Minneapolis, Boston, Chicago, Lafayette, IN, and Old Lyme, CT.
- One delegate organized a West Coast speaking tour that included 16 different venues and raised over \$1200 for Israeli and Palestinian organizations.
- At least five delegates returned to the Middle East in the last year; they organized photo workshops, helped to rebuild Palestinian homes, and worked with relief efforts in Lebanon.





Focus on Lobbying: Lobby Day with AFSC National Staff

On February 22, delegates from the November 2006 Olive Harvest delegation came to DC to engage their congressional representatives during a one-day program that included training and congressional office visits. Our partner in planning the November Olive Harvest delegation, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), planned the lobbying day, and invited Aura Kanegis, the AFSC Legislative

Director in Washington DC to prepare the delegates with a training session on lobbying.

Six delegates from the Olive Harvest delegation, in addition to four DC-area delegates, attended the session and visited their congressional representatives in the afternoon. There were nine meetings with congressional staffers. Delegates shared their experiences from the delegation, encouraged action on a bill banning cluster bombs, and began to build a relationship with congressional offices as a basis for future action.

California Delegate Visits

On a trip to California in February, IFPB co-director Mike Daly met with almost 20 former IFPB delegates to discuss Interfaith Peace-Builders, learn about activism on the West Coast, and introduce delegates from different delegations to one another.



The three main events were a presentation for the Monterey County Citizens for Mid-East Peace, and two IFPB delegate reunions in Santa Cruz and San Francisco. The trip was a great opportunity to meet former delegates and learn about their work. We hope to be able to reconnect with more delegate groupings around North America in the coming year.

Join a delegation soon to learn more about the conflict, meet Israelis and Palestinians, and deepen your work in North America.

Upcoming Delegations

July 28 – August 11, 2007

Led by Mark Braverman & Meera Shah

October 27 – November 10, 2007

**Cosponsored with AFSC*

Led by Adam Horowitz & Scott Kennedy

March 22 – April 5, 2008

May 24 – June 7, 2008

**Cosponsored with AFSC*

Learn more: www.ifpbdel.org/upcoming.html

Stay informed about delegate activities

We've devoted part of our website to sharing what we know delegates have done to engage their local communities to work for peace in Israel/Palestine. This section of the web includes links to articles and interviews, more descriptions of the ongoing work, and links to delegates who maintain their own websites. Check it out here: www.ifpbdel.org/us

Finally, if you'd like to know if there are delegates near you for presentations, educational events, etc, let us know—we'd be happy to connect you!