



Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding Calls for "Shared Compassion" in Middle East

11.06.2002

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As the board of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding of Muhlenberg College, we deplore the violence that has overwhelmed efforts at peace-making in the Middle East in recent months. Feelings of frustration, distrust, anger and betrayal are broadly shared in both the Israeli and the Palestinian communities; the violence expresses these feelings but makes no contribution to resolving the issues that give rise to them. At the same time, dehumanization and demonization of the perceived enemy are increasingly being used both to justify the violence and as weapons in themselves. We have learned, in working for understanding among Jews and Christians over the past 12 years, that it is critical to distinguish carefully among issues, values, policies and identities. No simple analysis is adequate to disentangle the complexities of history, politics and national self-expression that underlie this conflict. Proxy battles fought at some distance from the front lines rarely inform and never resolve the conflict. Only shared compassion from the best of our religious traditions and common humanitarian interest will empower the Arabs, Israelis, and Palestinians to move into a future that meets their respective hopes to a reasonable degree. It is they, living on the front lines of the conflict, who will have to discern the way forward and make the commitment to walk it together. We encourage all the parties involved to begin such a process of discernment, grounded in mutual respect for their human dignity. Grievances over the past comprise a welter of claims and counterclaims, and we believe that commitment to a shared and constructive future is the most promising route to overcoming the impasse to which these have led. We look to the United States government, working together with other regional and world powers, to provide the context and support that will enable both Israel and the Palestinians to move forward.