



**Milwaukee  
Jewish  
Council**

Helpaer Community Services Building  
1360 North Prospect Avenue  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202  
Phone 414-276-7920  
FAX 414-276-7902

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Position of the  
Milwaukee Jewish Council Executive Committee regarding  
Justice--post Persian Gulf War (see attached).

*You shall have no other gods besides me. You shall not kill. You shall not steal. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.*  
(Exodus 20:3, 13, 15, 17).

*O you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in upholding equity, bearing witness to the truth for the sake of God, even though it be against your own selves or your parents and kinsfolk. Whether the person concerned be rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over (the claims of) either of them. Do not, then, follow your own desires, lest you swerve from justice: for if you distort (the truth), behold, God is indeed aware of all that you do!*  
(Qur'an 4:135).

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. If we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.*  
(Galatians 5:22, 25-6).

*They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying 'peace, peace' when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they did not know how to blush.*  
(Jeremiah 8: 11-12)

As leaders and members of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faith communities, we have been deeply affected by the events which have taken place in the Middle East over the past months. We grieve over the tremendous loss of human life in the Persian Gulf. We also grieve the ongoing loss of human life and dignity in our own city, a city devastated by grinding poverty, unemployment and racism. To accept without question or action transgressions and violations of the values and laws with which our creator has entrusted us, is nothing less than complicity in these evils. As people who have gathered together based on a common belief in God and the unifying ethical and moral standards of religion, we have a special responsibility to remind ourselves and those in our communities about principles which are common to our faiths. We believe that we must recognize, identify, and then address the idolatries of racism, materialism, militarism, and nationalism by:

- 1) stressing the need to respect all human life and to be tolerant and compassionate.
- 2) striving to meet the basic human needs of all people, needs which must take precedence over the pursuit and protection of individual and national wealth.
- 3) overcoming racism, fear, hatred, prejudice, insecurity, and misunderstanding between peoples of all communities and nations by promoting mutual understanding and respect.
- 4) recognizing that extreme feelings of nationalism work against global unity and the equality and common humanity of all people.
- 5) decreasing our reliance on military force and power as a means for resolving global disputes.

The Persian Gulf War has highlighted many of the endemic problems of the Middle East. Our military victory has resolved none of these issues. As people of faith, we hope that our statement will help others draw upon their own faith first to begin to understand and then to address the international and domestic issues which confront us. Only then can we speak confidently about stability, peace, and justice.

### STUDY GUIDE

- 1) Thou shall have no other gods besides me (Exodus 20:3). How are racism, materialism, militarism and nationalism idolatrous?
- 2) How do we, as people of faith, understand evil? What should be our response? Is neutrality complicity?
- 3) Studying the five points above, list ways that we can accomplish these objectives.

*O mankind! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him.*  
(Qur'an 49:13).

*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for God has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers.*  
(Psalms 24:1,2).

*They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every person under their vine and under their fig tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.*  
(Micah 4:3b-4).

*...do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs, and do not spread corruption on earth after it had been (made) so well ordered: (all) this is for your own good, if you would but believe.*  
(Qur'an 7:85)...*be not like this using your oaths as a means of deceiving one another, simply because some of you may be more powerful than others.*  
(Qur'an 16:92)

## ON THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Our country should pursue policies that are aimed at ensuring the rights of all people to live in dignity, free of oppression. We also stand opposed to aggression of one nation against another and the illegal acquisition and annexation of territory by war in all regions of the world. Our stand against violations of peoples' rights must be clear, consistent, and free of the double standards which have to date characterized our country's policies.

Our country should pursue policies aimed at promoting representative governments which reflect the aspirations of the people. Support of monarchies, dictatorships, and repressive regimes which rely on military power must end. Only by forging ties with the people of various countries can our long term interests be insured.

Our country should promote regional economic integration in order to lessen the enormous gap which currently exists between the world's haves and have-nots. In the Middle East, a much more fair distribution of wealth among the indigenous peoples of the region is essential. Throughout the world, a portion of the funds allocated for military purposes should be redirected towards satisfying the basic needs denied to so many in our world.

Our country should end the flow of arms to volatile regions of the world, and work to eliminate weapons of mass destruction from these regions. Evenhandedness and consistency are absolutely essential.

Our country should ensure the fair application of International law. We cannot accept such laws when they are in our interest and reject them when they contradict the policies which we are pursuing. International organizations such as the United Nations should not be used as a tool to serve the interests of any individual nation. The pursuit of justice must take precedence.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. List and discuss areas of oppression in the world today. How can the faith community respond to these injustices?
2. In the past decades, the gap between the haves and the have-nots has widened in our world. What role has the U.S. played and what should determine U.S. foreign policy?
3. How does the Biblical injunction "beating swords into plowshares" apply to the world today in terms of arms sales, weapons of mass destruction, and conventional weapons?

*Where there is no vision, the people perish.  
(Proverbs 29:18).*

*If anyone has the world's goods and sees their brother or sister in need, yet closes their heart against them, how does God's love abide in them? ...let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.  
(I John 3:17-18).*

*Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream.  
(Amos 5:24).*

*Those who spend of their possessions (for the sake of God) by night and by day, secretly and openly, shall have their reward with their sustainer; and no fear shall they have, and neither shall they grieve. (Qur'an 2:274).*

## ON THE DOMESTIC LEVEL

We believe that the greatness of a nation does not rest on its exercise of military power, but on its ability to satisfy the needs of its people. We demand that the domestic problems of our country be pursued with the same vigor with which our country pursued the war in the Persian Gulf. Why can't the human and material resources, including funds, technology, and creative energy, which were so readily available for pursuing the war effort, be used for domestic needs and programs?

Poverty, racism, homelessness, healthcare, education, drugs, crime, and joblessness are only a few of the serious problems which must be addressed. It seems preposterous that the most powerful country in the world cannot even provide affordable housing for its poor. Why is it that questions of social justice in our country are often relegated to secondary status?

The war in the Persian Gulf has exacerbated our domestic problems. The money expended on the war was never available for creating jobs, for job retraining, for adult literacy programs, for mass transit, for cleaning up the environment, for cancer and other medical research, for retaining industries within our cities, or for helping sustain family farms. Will we cut further the funds we allocate to those who need it so that we can try to reduce our enormous deficit, or so that we can pay the losses of the savings and loan crisis? Is it just to cut even more funds from the people who need it the most?

We must reexamine our policies, adjust our priorities, and address the problems at home before we go off to various parts of the world and exercise our military and economic muscle. How can we meet the challenges of the future unless we develop a strong educational system, a strong economic system, an efficient and innovative production system, as well as a functional representative democracy in which decisions are made by people who are informed?

## STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1) Why have our domestic needs not been given the priority of the recent war effort in the gulf? As people of faith, how can we change our nation's priorities?
- 2) 'New world order' is an ambiguous vision. What are the values and priorities of the faith community which should shape this vision?
- 3) Justice viewed from a faith perspective is often different from justice of the legal system. Are poverty, racism, homelessness and unemployment unjust?

*God has showed you, people, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*  
(Micah 6:8).

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.*  
(Romans 12:9-10).

*And do good unto your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the neighbor from among your own people, and the neighbor who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, and the wayfarer... (Qur'an 4:36). And devour not one another's possessions wrongfully, and neither employ legal artifices with a view to devouring sinfully, and knowingly, anything that by right belongs to others.*  
(Qur'an 2:188)

## ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

As the intense efforts to rebuild Kuwait are underway, we look out our own windows at a city which is also desperately in need of repair. The atrocities which confront many of us are not thousands of miles away. They are the daily problems in the city of Milwaukee, where we live and work. They are the forces of racism and economic priorities which marginalize more than 50% of the minority population. They are the struggles for survival of people working at minimum wage jobs, valiantly attempting to pay rent and buy food. They are the starving, homeless children. They are the boarded-up buildings and crack houses.

Our city has been aptly described as "hypersegregated." More than half of all black Milwaukeeans are on some form of public assistance. The black unemployment rate is over 20%, five times the rate of white unemployment. Nearly 60,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the last decade, and even if every current job vacancy in this city was filled, we would still have 38,000 unemployed workers. The homicide rate more than doubled in the past three years, from 78 in 1988 to 165 in 1990. The number of empty lots and boarded up houses is increasing. The widening gulf is not only located in the Middle East, but between the have and have-nots in this city.

As committed citizens and people of faith we have a mandate to pursue justice. Justice takes many forms. It is commitment to community development, and to the life and dignity of each of our citizens. It is a discrimination-free environment, with all individuals treated equally. It is children nurtured in safe, caring conditions. It is the availability of living-wage employment for all. It is quality education. It is reaffirming our commitment to advocacy and working for social and economic justice.

Most importantly, we must be witnesses to the hope that exists. Hope grounded in faith, hope built on a vision for a safe, healthy, caring community, hope based on the belief that we can make a difference, hope that leads to resolve and commitment.

This country, and particularly this city, has resources to build a healthy community - empowered and creative individuals, congregations, community organizations, economic and corporate structures and government networks. Working in partnership, for the benefit of all, we can make a difference. We can be at home, in peace.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss and list the atrocities that exist in Milwaukee.
- 2) How can the faith community seek justice in our city?
- 3) Draw up plans for your congregation to take up immediate and long-term actions to bring God's justice to Milwaukee.
- 4) Is your faith community involved with existing social and other agencies in the Milwaukee area? If not, draw up a plan of action.