

MIDDLE EAST ISSUES

Statements by
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ON ISRAEL AND THE U.N.

September 3, 1975

The meeting of the United Nations this fall will face a number of serious and difficult issues at a time when the state of U.S.-U.N. relations is both troubled and problematic. Because of the significant role which the United Nations plays in the world and because of the substantial position of the United States in the United Nations, it is of vital importance to prevent further deterioration in U.S.-U.N. relations. This requires that key issues be clarified in public debate.

One such issue is the status of Israel in the United Nations. Some nations who themselves will be presenting legitimate and valid claims before the United Nations this Fall in the Seventh Special Session and the General Assembly are at the present time discussing the suspension or expulsion of Israel from the United Nations. Such proposals are both unjustified and unwise; they can threaten the very viability of the United Nations as a functioning international agency. Hence I wish to state my clear and firm opposition to any actions supporting this posture.

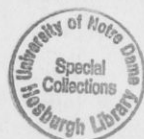
In the Middle East dispute all parties possess certain just claims; no single party has all of the justice claims on its side. In 1973 the U.S. Catholic Conference defined its position on the

dispute in a statement which sought to acknowledge the legitimate claims of each party. These include: (1) the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign state with secure boundaries; and (2) the right of the Palestinian Arabs to inclusion in any negotiations, the right to a sovereign state and to compensation for past losses. Furthermore, at that time we supported U.N. Resolution 242 as the basis for a negotiated settlement. We still believe this Resolution supplies the basic requirements for a just and peaceful settlement of this tragic situation.

The complexity of Middle East conflict is immense. But the right of Israel, as well as of the other parties to the dispute, to present a case at the United Nations is clear. Any efforts to deprive Israel of this right should be strongly opposed.

While the United Nations remains a fragile organization, it is a unique agency in international affairs. In an increasingly interdependent world, it is the best example we have of an international community. The operating presumption of this organization should be directed toward the involvement of all the parties in its deliberations, not the arbitrary or prejudicial exclusion of some. While this presumption may be overridden in extreme cases, such action should be undertaken only after all other efforts have failed and reasons clearly exist to merit such drastic measures. These conditions clearly do not exist in reference to Israel. Membership in the United Nations today is not so much a privilege as a necessary condition for providing all nations with an instrument to deal with the global problems of interdependence.

Building a real international, political community, based on justice and striving for peace, is a complex and delicate process. It requires the insights, talents and perspectives of all nations and all peoples. Universal agreement is not easily attained nor should it be always expected; but debate and discussion involving all interested parties is a minimum requirement for a global community.



ON U.N. VOTE ON ZIONISM

November 11, 1975

As President of the U.S. Catholic Conference, I wish to express my profound disagreement with, and great disappointment at, the vote of the United Nations General Assembly yesterday, classifying Zionism as a form of racism. The resolution is unjust. Because of its substantive inadequacy it both retards the necessary struggle against racism in the world and opens the door to harassment, discrimination and denial of basic rights to members of the Jewish community throughout the world. For both of these reasons the passage of the resolution is to be deplored.

Among the unfortunate consequences of the resolution, the potential damage it can do the United Nations itself deserves special comment. The work of the United Nations continues to be vitally important in any conception of a just and peaceful world. Neither the strong nor the weak in the global community can afford the absence of the United Nations or the diminution of its functions. Tragically, this resolution makes it easy for some critics of the United Nations to impugn the legitimacy of the institution itself, while it makes it more difficult for supporters of the United Nations to defend its crucial role in the world today.

Nevertheless, even in the midst of the confusion and conflict generated by this ill-conceived and ill-defined measure, it is essential to make necessary distinctions and to exercise discrimination in responding to the resolution. To undermine the United Nations because of the substance of this resolution is to contribute further to the intellectual confusion which presently exists. To be specific about the U.S. response, I both identify with and commend the opposition of the U.S. delegation to the resolution. Implementation of this resolution should be vigorously opposed by the United States. It would be unfortunate, unnecessary and unjust, however, simply to terminate or even to diminish U.S. support for essential United Nations activities. Any such intemperate action would compound the confusion and conflict generated by the resolution. The United States should not be party to such a course of action. The intent and consequences of the resolution should continue to be opposed; the institution and work of the United Nations should continue to receive support.

Statement on LEBANON and the MIDDLE EAST

January, 1976

The conflict in Lebanon is tragic. The plight of the nation and its people cries out for understanding, compassion and concern from the international community and from the Christian Church in particular. The whole international community has a stake in the fate and future of Lebanon because of what it has represented in the modern history of the Middle East. The Christian Church is particularly called to concern for Lebanon because it has been the home of some of the oldest and largest Christian communities in the Middle East.

To know the history of Lebanon is to be doubly distressed at its present situation. Under difficult and dangerous conditions, the Lebanese people have woven a delicate pattern of political co-operation which has guaranteed an admirable and remarkable freedom in the religious and cultural order. Few would maintain that the system had no defects, but even fewer can deny its substantial achievements in the conflicted history of the modern Middle East. Part of the tragedy of the moment in Lebanon is that this intricate fabric of religious, cultural and political freedom is now at stake.

Those of us outside the daily conflict should not presume too readily that we have grasped its complex nature. My purpose in speaking is twofold: to express Christian concern for all parties and to bring the issue before the Catholic community in the United States. Faced with an immensely complex situation, our first obligation is to seek understanding. In that spirit, I offer the following reflections.

The nature of the present conflict is multi-dimensional: to isolate one element and to explain the total picture in light of it is to miss the

reality of the situation. At one level it is a religious conflict, involving members of the Christian and Muslim communities. In a society known worldwide for its religious tolerance, this dissolution of the fabric of peace is surely a great loss for all parties. The present strife has special significance for Christians since the importance of the Lebanese Christian community extends beyond the borders of that nation. In a sense the Christians of Lebanon have been a stabilizing and supportive force for other Christians in the Middle East; because of this preservation of religious freedom for all in Lebanon should be an objective for us outside and for those within the country. In a broader sense, the example of Christians and Muslims living together in a single society of Lebanon is a unique testimony to religious liberty in the world; no effort should be spared in preserving the fabric of this unique society.

While the religious factor is a central one in understanding the Lebanese conflict, it is not the only factor. A second level of the conflict is socio-economic in nature. Social class divisions in Lebanon cut across existing religious differences: for a growing Muslim population a key issue is the justice of the economic system. Observers of the situation vary in their assessment of the relative weight of the religious and economic issues, but no serious observer denies either of them.

Thirdly, the religious and socio-economic divisions are set in the context of a political conflict. This involves fundamental questions about the very structure and shape of Lebanese society. The changing demographic composition and social complexion of Lebanon have placed serious strains on the social compact by which the society has been governed. There appears to be general agreement that significant reform of the system is required, but substantial division exists about the kind of reform needed.

Finally, the unresolved political issues have now passed to military conflict. This is now the most drastic aspect of the situation, but it is also a sign and product of the deeper divisions in the social fabric.

As complex as these internal factors are, even they do not tell the whole story of the Lebanese

situation. First, the internal conflict must be seen in the context of broader currents in the international system, since several outside forces are affecting the struggle. Secondly, it is necessary to understand Lebanon in light of the regional conflict which still perdures in the Middle East. For almost three decades Lebanon has remained precariously but almost miraculously at the very edge of the central conflict in the Middle East; although touched by it, Lebanon has not been subsumed in it. With the breakdown of civil order in Lebanon, it appears now to have been fully swept into the Middle East picture. It seems difficult to conceive now of a stable Lebanese settlement outside of a relatively stable regional peace.

It seems difficult to conceive now of a lasting Lebanese settlement without the existence of a relatively stable regional peace. Everyone recognizes the costs of not achieving peace in the Middle East. The price of failing to achieve a lasting settlement in Lebanon should be equally clear to us; just as it is impossible to understand the conflict in Lebanon in isolation from other factors, so it is impossible to calculate the consequences of continued conflict solely in terms of its damage to Lebanon. For this reason the sustained attention and involvement of the international community, even perhaps an international peacekeeping force, is urgently required to protect the territorial integrity of the nation and to provide both emergency relief and reconstruction assistance.

The rationale for such response from those outside Lebanon is not limited to humanitarian concern, but should be based on an appreciation of the significance of Lebanon in the life of the Middle East politically, culturally, economically and religiously. It is the last reason which speaks directly to Christians in these days calling for our fraternal solidarity and support as well as our continuing interest that the unity of the country be protected, that justice be sought for all its citizens and that peace be restored.

Our concern for Lebanon simply reinforces our interest in the broader problem of the Middle East. An obvious link between Lebanon's internal strife and the larger Middle East problem is the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. There have been close links between Palestinians and the people

of Lebanon. Recognizing how the Palestinian problem is tied to the Lebanese conflict brings me back to the 1973 statement of the American Bishops, *Towards Peace in the Middle East*. In that statement we called for a comprehensive political settlement which would include:

"Recognition of the rights of the Palestinian Arabs, especially the refugees: this involves, in our view, inclusion of them as partners in any negotiations, acceptance of their right to a state and compensation for past losses to be paid not only by Israel but also by other members of the international community . . ."

This recognition of the rights of the Palestinians should be accompanied on their part and by others in the international community by "recognition of the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign state with secure boundaries" (*Towards Peace in the Middle East*). Moreover, we continue to believe today, as we did in 1973, that U.N. Resolution 242, as reaffirmed by U.N. Resolution 338, provides the best basis for negotiation in the Middle East and should be maintained. These three elements still appear to me to be the basis for a just and peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

There are signs that progress toward peace is being made in the Middle East. It continues to be true today as it was in 1973 that substantial progress toward a just peace, in Lebanon and in the region of the Middle East, will require significant and sustained involvement of major states in the international system and the international community as a whole. It is also clear, I think, that no permanent peace can exist in the region unless the just claims of the Palestinian people are met.

The role of the United States is central to both of these points. I use the occasion of this statement to urge our government toward two actions: first, to set an example of disinterested and constructive diplomacy in the Middle East; second, to take explicitly the position that the Palestinians be included as partners in future negotiations about the Middle East.

Our support of this second position, of course, is conditioned upon the Palestinian peoples' and their representatives accepting explicitly the right of Israel to exist in the Middle East as a sover-

eign state within secure boundaries. In a complex and conflicted situation like the Middle East, unless both sides are willing to give something the danger exists that many can lose everything.

In making this statement about Lebanon I am conscious of the danger, complexity and immense human suffering which mark the whole region of the Middle East. But I am also aware that those lands now marked by conflict have a favored place in the divine plan. The Prince of Peace was born there. Beyond our understanding, compassion and concern the people of Lebanon and all the people of the Middle East have a right to expect of us as American Catholics an even more precious gift: our prayers to the Prince of Peace that he might bestow the gift of peace on the whole Middle East. For this great gift I pledge my prayer and invite the prayers of others.

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