Time to End the Rhetoric on Iran

By Yashar Vasef

As I sat down to watch a recent Republican debate, I was struck by the candidates vying to out-hawk one another on the issue of Iran. It revealed the saddening truth for those of us who oppose war against Iran: We have let the discourse slip into deep waters.

Furthermore, we need to be aware of the activities of the Mujahedin eKhalq (MEK) also known as People’s Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI) or MKO. This is an organization, viewed by many inside and outside of Iran as cult-like, that aims to remove the current Iranian regime from power. They are also widely recognized as a terrorist organization themselves. Typical of such movements, they have set up a powerful lobby in Washington advocating for ‘forceful’ removal of the Iranian regime.

Presidential candidate Rick Santorum, former Senator Sam Brownback (R - Kansas), and current representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R - Florida) are their chief supporters in Washington. With the help of the aforementioned politicians, they have received millions of dollars for what they call “opposition activity”. Now is the time to contact our Iowa representatives and stress that we oppose any legislation in support of the MEK’s activities and those policies that will unnecessarily increase tensions between the two states.

In Iran we often remark on the unpredictability of Persian politics. This is a land where in the span of weeks Iran transformed from a dictator that boasted about Tehran having shorter mini-skirts than Paris to a hardliner clerical establishment which banned make-up. But at its core, the issue of Iran’s future is one that should be left to the will of the Iranian population.

To lose the Iranian population in this game of political jockeying and saber rattling would be one of the worst foreign policy blunders in American history. The Iranians should be viewed as a long term investment for the United States. If America stays patient, and allow the reform movement to play out, the United States would reap the benefits of a reformed Iran and will have a major strategic ally in the region outside of Israel. And one spawned from a mass civil movement as opposed to the House of Saud.
Physician’s Group Issues ‘Ankara Declaration’

By Paul Deaton

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), whose tagline is “practicing peace since 1980” works on a broad range of issues as they pursue a mission to create a more peaceful and secure world, freed from the threat of nuclear annihilation. They set the following priorities for action. Abolish nuclear weapons; prevent war, conflict and armed violence and build bridges through physician to physician diplomacy.

Last December, IPPNW met in Turkey to discuss Mideast regional issues related to nuclear non-proliferation, weapons of mass destruction, nuclear power, regional arms sales and others. One of the work products of this meeting was the “Ankara Declaration,” the text of which follows. The declaration indicates how IPPNW believes peace efforts in the Middle East should proceed:

IPPNW representatives from Israel, Iran, Egypt, United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Netherlands, Hungary and Turkey met in Ankara, Turkey, from Dec. 8 until 10, 2011, to address the issues of peace, health and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

The Middle East (ME) region is experiencing a turbulent period. There are political instability, ethnic and religious conflicts, economic difficulties and external military interventions causing detrimental effects on the health and well-being of the citizens of the Middle East.

We as health professionals have responsibilities to respond to these unacceptable conditions which have caused large scale suffering and loss of human life, and we are concerned that the existing conflicts could escalate into the use of weapons of mass destruction. We call for:

• Sincere commitment of governments for peaceful resolution of conflicts without use of military force; and using diplomacy and the rule of international law.
• We demand that all signatories to NPT to ratify and observe their responsibilities immediately.
• Noting the published reports that there are nuclear weapons in Israel and tactical NATO nuclear weapons in Turkey, and there are concerns that Iran is developing nuclear weapons; and there are possible chemical and biological weapons in the ME countries, governments should immediately start negotiations to establish a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone - Middle East (WMDFZ-ME) including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; and take measures to strengthen the implementation of chemical weapons convention (CWC) and biological weapons convention (BWC). We demand that all governments immediately start negotiations to establish a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC). We call for the development of regional International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) activities.
• We oppose the plans for deploying Missile Defense Systems including those recently positioned in Turkey. They must be removed at once as the system escalates the danger of nuclear proliferation.
• We demand the strict observation of the landmines convention.
• Cease the supply of small arms, conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction (or the components of such) in the region.
• The construction of nuclear power plants is a threat to the health of people and the environment of the ME as well as a stimulus to nuclear weapons proliferation. The ME is a primary earthquake region. Considering the bitter lessons of the Fukushima Catastrophe and past accidents such as Chernobyl, we call for an immediate abandoning of nuclear plant construction programs. The establishment of the renewable energy alternatives to nuclear power should be promoted.
• There are immense public health problems in the communities of the ME and primary health care programs have suffered from financial restriction and ongoing conflicts. We demand the immediate reallocation of military funding to health budgets. All efforts should be exerted by all governments and institutions to immediately end Israeli-Palestine/ Jewish-Arab conflict through peace negotiations.
Scattergood Students Perambulate for Peace

By Christine Ashley

Sunday, November 13, 2011 was a beautiful windy autumn day, and more than two dozen of our students and teachers took part in a Peace Walk from Scattergood Friends School to downtown Iowa City. We called on government to spend less money on waging war and more on providing access to higher education. We walked for peace just as we work for peace. It was our way of saying "We are here!" "We have something to say!" and "We are in this discussion of planning for our future, don't forget." We carried signs that read "Education not Bombs," "Education for All," "Learn more," and the number of our participants grew as we reached Iowa City. Members from three Kiwanis groups and members of Occupy Iowa City joined us. People waved and honked their support as we chanted and sang. "All we want to do is learn/Student loans feel like a burn!" and "13 miles for Peace!" was another chant. The students were so excited to take this walk, like those Scattergood students before them in 1961, 1969 and 1986, and are already talking about an annual walk for peace.

Walking this distance in the windy elements, we talked about how we feel we can do something to change the world, and that it is possible to achieve peace . . . and we can start today . . . I take heart that together, we can and will work for peace. Youtube video of the Peace Walkers arriving at Old Brick/Peace Center:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XveLNFMvAYA&feature=related%20

Peace Iowa Committee Members

Program and Education: Chris Klug, Ed Flaherty, Nancy Porter, Garry Klein, Dawn Jones, Jeff Strottman
Fundraising/Outreach/Membership: Ann Stromququist, Maria Kummer, Lori Nelson, Miriam Timmer-Hackert
Tech support/Website/Newsletter: Yashar Vasef, Ethan Nelson-Moore, Andy Douglas, Dennis Bricker, Ann Stromququist

Interested in serving on a committee? Contact PEACE Iowa office at 354-1925 or email peaceiowa@telecom.net,
Conference Highlights US Policy in Palestine-Israel

By Andy Douglas

Recently I was asked to consider what I would do if I saw my home demolished, my neighbors' crops destroyed, and my family divided by a wall down the middle of my land? This startling exercise in empathy was designed to bring home what millions of Palestinians feel every day, as they face what Jewish Voice for Peace calls the realities of an "apartheid state."

The question arose at a conference I attended on “U.S. Policy in Palestine-Israel.” Organized by the American Friends Service Committee (Peace Iowa was one of many co-sponsors), the event’s focus was on understanding the current situation in the Middle East, and organizing in one’s local area to redress Israel's discriminatory policies.

Such work, we were reminded, is not about bashing Israelis, or taking away from what they’ve suffered. It’s not anti-Semitic. Rather, the impulse comes from recognition of universal human rights and needs.

Speakers included journalist Laila El-Haddad, and Phyllis Bennis, Institute of Policy Studies fellow. Bennis noted that the discourse in the Middle East is changing, and that this is cause for optimism. Previously an assumption held sway in the West that Israel was the region’s only democracy, and the U.S.’s only friend there. That’s changed with the coming of the Arab Spring. Besides this, Israel’s policies are causing them to lose allies. No country in Europe now buys Israeli agricultural products. Turkey and Egypt have turned their backs on Israel. The Swedish government cancelled a light rail contract with construction firm Veolia because it had built rail projects in Israeli settlements. It’s no longer political suicide to criticize Israeli policies.

If the U.S. is serious about trimming its national deficit, and understands that the situation in Palestine is probably the largest aggravator of anger in the Muslim world, aid reduction would be a good place to start. One main tool in this fight is the BDS or boycott-divestment-sanction option, which takes a page from the South Africa anti-apartheid campaign. I attended a workshop led by Rachel Orville of the Minnesota Break the Bonds Campaign. Minnesotans have been pressuring their institutions - universities and state government - to divest their investment portfolios, with some success. A major thrust is to compel retirement fund giant TIAA-CREF to stop investing in companies that profit from the Israeli occupation, such as Motorola. The boycott component targets products and companies profiting from the violation of Palestinian rights; companies such as L’oreal, J. C. Penney’s, and Starbucks.

Many people of faith have been influenced by the release of a statement by a group of Palestinian Christians called The Kairos Document, urging the use of BDS tactics to force change. "The separation wall has turned our towns into prisons..." the statement notes. "Israeli settlements ravage our land in the name of God, controlling our natural resources...there is separation between members of the same family..." It also claims that “our presence in this land is not accidental but deeply rooted in the history and geography of the land...” The Document, and the response to it by American churches, reflects the growing understanding that a universal interpretation, not a limited sectarian one, of human relationship to each other and the divine is key to resolving the thorny issues facing Israel and Palestine.

Thank You for Helping PEACE Iowa Thrive

We depend on your donations to continue our important work. Send your donations to:
26 East Market Street, Iowa City, Iowa 52245
Divestment Talk Set on 2/6 at ICPL

Bill McGrath, a representative from the Minnesota Break the Bonds Campaign (MBBC), will speak on Monday, Feb. 6, 7 p.m. at the Iowa City Public Library. MBBC is seeking divestment from bonds that the State of Minnesota has purchased from the government of Israel.

McGrath will share some of the organization’s efforts, struggles, and successes. He will also describe his personal experiences from July 20 until Aug. 19, 2007, when he lived with an Arab Palestinian Christian family in Beit Sahour, two miles from Bethlehem. In Public Library Meeting Room A.

Sponsored by People for Justice with Palestine. (Not a PEACE Iowa sponsored event)

ACT NOW! No War with Iran

Ed Flaherty writes: "There has been no "winner" in our war with Iraq. There would be no winners in any war with Iran. If there was ever a time for diplomacy, it is now. If ever there was a time for arrogance and self-righteousness, it is NOT now. How utterly absurd it would be to go to war because of Israel's insecurity (while possessing 200+ nuclear weapons) based on Iran's purported striving for nuclear weapons (zero indication of program to produce nuclear bombs, per Leon Panetta). Please spend just a couple minutes to call President Obama, Senators Harkin & Grassley, and Representative Loebsack to ask that they do what they can to "throw cold water" on anything that may lead to war with Iran. This is truly the time for diplomacy."


PEACE Iowa EVENTS

Gandhi Workshop

A workshop entitled “Toward the Uplift of All: Building an Alternative Society Rooted in Gandhian Nonviolence” will be held from 1 to 4 p.m., Saturday, April 21st in the Wesley House main lounge. Led by Chris Klug, who has studied Gandhi’s ideas for many years during many trips to India, the workshop will focus on a few basic ideas and practices of Gandhi that could guide nonviolent reflection/actions, e.g., means and ends, willingness to die, opponent not enemy, etc. This seminar will examine how Gandhi’s "Constructive Program" was an alternative to the systemic violence of the Indian society of his time, and how we can participate in fashioning and supporting nonviolent alternatives to systemic violence today. There will be a presentation and small group discussion.

A Night of a Thousand Dinners

The Iowa United Nations Association “Night of 1000 Dinners” will be held on March 8th, 5:30-8:30 p.m. at Old Brick. PEACE Iowa is a co-sponsor. Funds raised this year will go to the UN Trust Fund to Support Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women.
On Dr. King's birthday in January of 2011, a dozen peace activists met to plan for the Iowa caucuses, which were then more than a year away. The inspiration for the gathering was Dr. King's famous speech, delivered at Riverside Church in 1967, and entitled "A Time to Break the Silence." Dr. King took a momentous step in that speech. Arguing that war is not like other issues, he broke with the Democratic Party, and what is more important from President Lyndon Johnson, over the Viet Nam war. Dr. King knew that he shared with President Johnson the credit for the passing of the 1964 civil rights act, and the 1965 voting rights act, two pieces of legislation that between them did the unthinkable, i.e., brought an end to racial segregation in the American south.

In 2011 we faced a dilemma similar to the one faced by Dr. King. Most of us were loyal to a President, an African-American president from Chicago who after achieving the unthinkable, i.e., being elected president by carrying three states of the former Confederacy, had become a war president. On the advice of Generals Petraeus and McChrystal, he launched a massive surge in Afghanistan against a guerrilla force based in civilian households. Even on its own terms, the surge was a miserable failure, causing unquantifiable horror in Afghanistan and among the 3000 national guard troops who were sent from Iowa, and their families. Furthermore, he was conducting drone wars directed against civilian households in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, which resulted in little girls being burned alive, little boys being mutilated, and elderly couples being crushed to death as they lay sleeping in their beds, with no possible end in sight unless Americans rose up in protest against his policies.

Quakers have a phrase, "as the way opens," which refers to opportunities we might have to follow the leadings of the spirit, and the way open for us was the Iowa caucuses. We formed the Iowa Healthcare not Warfare Campaign to use the Iowa caucuses as a forum to put forward our view that the money spent on President Obama's wars should be spent instead on providing an entitlement to national health insurance for every American. The goal was to give Iowans an opportunity, provided by the caucus, to stand for peace without damaging President Obama's chance for re-election by voting for a third party peace candidate in the general election. Our goal was to send a message to President Obama to change course before it is too late, and before we faced a general election in which both major party candidates were committed to sustaining the unwinnable and astonishingly brutal war in Afghanistan and the immoral drone wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia.

Many of our strongest supporters, recruiting during petition drives in the summer and fall, abandoned ship to support Ron Paul in the Republican caucuses, and it was difficult to argue that they were doing something wrong, given the enormity of the issues faced by the country. Furthermore, we were a candidate-less, money-less and staff-less campaign up against a billion dollar Wall Street funded campaign, as well as the aggressive hostility of the Iowa Democratic Party leadership, who were in charge of setting the rules for the caucuses.

There was also the complicated issue of "caucus math," in which delegate preference groups in each caucus must have 15% of those attending to get even one delegate. Most people predicted that we would not be viable anywhere, but in the end we garnered over 10% of the delegates in Johnson County, and groups of uncommitted delegates were elected in Polk, Story, Muscatine, Washington, and Winneshiek counties. Ed Flaherty plans to carry the argument for peace forward at the Johnson County Democratic Convention in March. Please get in touch with him if you are willing to help. It may be your last chance to speak out for peace in the electoral process.

Elsie Kuhn Remembered by PEACE Iowa Volunteers

Elsie Kuhn was a volunteer in the PEACE Iowa office for about three years. She was a strong advocate for peace, and in her quiet way worked hard to carry out the work of the peace center. Always kind and gentle, she noticed things that needed to be done and did them without calling attention to herself. She had a soft and pleasant voice, an asset when we needed to call volunteers to help with our activities. She catalogued many of PEACE Iowa’s resources, including books, pamphlets, and videos. Her organizational skills set the standard for future office volunteers. Elsie died in December 2010. A volunteer award was created in her honor. We miss her!
The Annual Membership meeting was held at Iowa City City Park on Sept. 12, 2011. Gathering at noon, we enjoyed delicious potluck food while listening to the Blue Stem Trio (Loren & Margaret Brumm and Tim Schulte) play old-time jazz favorites. Before turning to the business of our annual meeting, we sang rousing versions of *Down by the Riverside* and *If I Had a Hammer*, held hands around the room and concluded with *We Shall Overcome*.

Paul Deaton, Chair, welcomed everyone and introduced Board members. He reviewed the meeting agenda, and explained the process for joining PEACE Iowa. At least four new members joined during the meeting. Ann Stromquist introduced the PEACE Iowa office volunteers (herself, Marcia Shaffer, Christine Rumsey, Dennis Bricker, Jeff Strottman, Franklin Seiberling, Ethan Nelson-Moore, and Lori Nelson) and former office volunteers (Ed Flaherty and Georgiane Perret).

Lori Nelson described the origins of PEACE Iowa. It developed out of Iowans For Peace, a coalition of groups that formed after the attacks of September 11, 2001. That coalition eventually grew to include over 20 groups, and later established PEACE Iowa in order to have a home for area peace groups. Lori highlighted the many accomplishments of PEACE Iowa since its creation in 2007, including vigils, workshops, speakers, and special projects such as curtailing military recruiter activity in area high schools and the Iowa-Iran Cultivating Peace Children's Project.

Maria Kummer and Nancy Porter led a brainstorming session to elicit ideas for the future of PEACE Iowa, including general goals and specific projects. The Board and volunteers will consider these ideas and use them as guides for prioritizing plans for the coming year or two.

Garry Klein and Yashar Vasef were nominated for membership on the Board and were both unanimously elected.

Miriam Timmer-Hackert introduced the two awards presented by PEACE Iowa: the Grassroots Peace Leadership Award awarded to Roger Farmer and the Elsie Kuhn Office Volunteer Award awarded to Christine Rumsey. Maria introduced Roger and spoke of his contributions to peace, especially his activities with the rural southeastern Iowa group Just Peace Outreach Group. Roger then spoke briefly about his work. Lori introduced Christine as the volunteer who has worked in the office longer than anyone else and described the work she has done. She also announced that as of September 30 Christine will no longer be a regular volunteer; she has, however, agreed to be a substitute office volunteer.

Paul had previously announced that he would resign from the Board after the annual meeting. We applauded him for his service on the Board and as Chair of the Board. Miriam presented him with a very small wooden doll’s chair. Laughter and more applause followed. Miriam then thanked Lori for her longtime service to PEACE Iowa, mentioning that if it weren’t for Lori there wouldn’t be a PEACE Iowa, and presented her with a bouquet of bright-colored flowers. We expressed our appreciation to Lori and applauded her.

The next annual membership meeting will be in the fall of 2012.

### PEACE Iowa Goals for the Future

At a recent board meeting, board members listed specific goals and/or projects we would like to see PEACE Iowa pursue in the coming year. These included:

- Organize the office and PEACE Iowa records, membership, supporters, finances
- Fundraising
- Facilitate conflict resolution in schools and other venues
- Broaden our understanding of peace to include concern for the environment
- Bring back a Peace Fair
- Use music as energizer at our events
- Mall walking wearing peace-related t-shirts
- Work with teachers and students, including university, high school, junior high, and even elementary students
- Sponsor contest for students – button designs, t-shirts, peace essay
- Media: Public Service Announcements (PSAs), KRUI – UI student radio, Iowa Public Radio ads
- Learn more about Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP). In addition to work in prisons, AVP could be used in communities.
MEET THE NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Garry Klein is a long-time peace advocate and is especially proud of the fact that his birthday coincides with the day Martin Luther King gave his “I Have a Dream” speech. He is Director of Program Assessment & Research at The University of Iowa’s Pomerantz Career. He is married to Betsy Klein who is a jewelry designer and shares house space with two elderly dogs, Yin and Yang, and a singularly demanding Bombay cat, Duncan. Garry will be on the Education and Action Committee.

Yashar Vasef currently serves as the executive director of the Iowa United Nations Association. Before joining the United Nations Association, he served internships with the policy think-tank The Stanley Foundation and the Middle East-centric media consultant BoomGen Studios. A native of Iran, Yashar attended the University of Iowa with an academic focus on international politics and Islam.