

ADL pulls out of interfaith talks over Israel

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JERUSALEM (RNS) The Anti-Defamation League said Thursday (Oct. 11) it has withdrawn from an Oct. 22 U.S. Jewish-Christian interfaith meeting to protest a letter from some Protestant participants that urged Congress to rethink U.S. funding to Israel.

Numerous Jewish organizations have condemned the letter, which was signed by leaders of the Presbyterian, United Methodist, Lutheran, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ denominations, as well as the head of the National Council of Churches.

Although the letter acknowledged "the pain and suffering" of both "Israelis as a result of Palestinian actions and of Palestinians as a result of Israeli actions," it called for a U.S. government investigation into whether Israel violates laws governing U.S. foreign aid. It did not request a similar probe of Palestinians.

Since the end of World War II, Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign assistance, according to the Congressional Research Service. Almost all the aid is in the form of military assistance and contracts.

"As Christian leaders in the United States, it is our moral responsibility to question the continuation of unconditional U.S. financial assistance to the government of Israel," the letter said.

"Realizing a just and lasting peace will require this accountability, as continued U.S. military assistance to Israel - offered without conditions or accountability - will only serve to sustain the status quo and Israel's military occupation of the Palestinian territories."

ADL National Director Abraham Foxman said the signatories' actions – without first informing Jewish groups – have "seriously damaged the foundation for mutual respect" necessary for interfaith dialogue.

Daniel S. Mariaschin, executive vice president of B'nai B'rith International, called the letter "a thinly veiled attempt to try to harm Israel, and U.S.-Israel relations." The Reform movement's Washington-based Religious Action Center said the letter "mischaracterizes" the situation in Israel and the Palestinian territories, "wrongly holds only Israel accountable" for regional problems "and does not advance the regional and security interests of the U.S."

"Have these church leaders felt morally impelled to write to the governments of Egypt, Iraq or Sudan about the perilous predicament of their historic Christian communities?" said Morton A. Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America.

A representative of the National Council of Churches was not immediately available for comment.