

Interreligious mobilization

The workshop included about thirty-five participants from Muslim, Jewish and Christian organizations. Participants discussed the unique role that religious organizations can have in resolving the conflict. Religious organizations have infrastructure on the ground, the trust of communities, the ability to work on changing hearts, the ability to exert moral authority, and “staying power,” to name a few strengths. Clearly, religious communities face challenges as well—religion can be used to divide as well as to unite.

Participants outlined four areas of work: building partnerships, divestment, addressing Christian Zionism and conflict resolution. In the area of building partnerships, religious leaders shared strategies they used to build partnerships with communities that may not share the same views. They affirmed the need to build more connections with Jewish and Israeli communities and found the Tuesday panel helpful in this regard. They also discussed ways of reaching conservative evangelicals and confronting theological beliefs that confuse the issue. One church is preparing an educational video to reach evangelical communities and to challenge Christian Zionism in moderate Christian communities. Another organization shared its mapping project which they used to outline a strategic approach in their community. Too often, they pointed out, work is done without this power analysis.

A clarification of the Presbyterian position on divestment was given, as much information circulated both by opponents and allies has been confused. The Presbyterian Church is examining how to use its power as stockholders to influence corporations involved in economic arrangements that exacerbate the conflict. Over the next year it will examine whether and how this strategy might be effective. The decision to look into divestment illustrates the frustration and agony that church leaders are experiencing as they watch conditions worsen for their partners in Palestine and Israel. Other churches are considering divestment, and are encouraged to do so only in collaboration with their Jewish and Christian allies and partners, and to be prepared to communicate this position with media around the world so that their intentions of bringing peace to both sides of the conflict is clear. Religious communities also have strong resources for training leaders in conflict resolution and preventing conflict. The World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (eappi.org) is one such example.