



**5th Annual National
Organizers' Conference
Dearborn, MI
Sept. 1-3, 2006
CONFERENCE REPORT**

More than 200 organizers from 27 states and 51 different organizations met at the University of Michigan-Dearborn for the 5th Annual National Organizers' Conference of the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation to network, prioritize, and strategize for the upcoming year.

The conference was hosted by the University of Michigan-Dearborn Student Government; the US Campaign would like to thank the Student Government for its sponsorship of the conference.

OPENING RECEPTION & AWARDS PROGRAM

The conference began with an opening reception and awards program on Friday night, September 1, at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn. Following a delicious reception, attendees were treated to a musical performance by Doolab. After opening remarks by Nadia Hijab and Mark Lance, Co-Chairs of the US Campaign, and a welcome by Hasan Newash, our local host from the Palestine Office, Omar Masri, US Campaign Office Manager, presented the local organizing committee and local volunteers with awards—certificates of an olive tree planted in their names in Palestine—in appreciation for their help organizing the conference.

Our special guest for the evening, Danny Glover, humanitarian activist and actor, shared reflections on Edward Said and Josh Ruebner, US Campaign Grassroots Advocacy Coordinator, awarded to Reps. Carolyn Kilpatrick and John Conyers the 2nd Annual Edward Said Human Rights Award in honor of their work in Congress to promote peace and justice in the Middle East.

Diana Buttu, former legal advisor to the PLO, delivered the keynote address, which focused on the current dire humanitarian conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. After a financial appeal by US Campaign Steering Committee members Huwaida Arraf and David Wildman, which raised more than \$5,000, Danny Glover and Kathy Engel, poet and founder of MADRE, closed the evening with moving poetry readings. Noura Erakat, US Campaign National Grassroots Organizer/Legal Advocate, emceed the evening.

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

During the introductory session, members of the Steering Committee and staff presented the [Annual Report](#), highlighting the accomplishments of the US Campaign since the 4th Annual National Organizers' Conference. The report summarizes US Campaign work on the Caterpillar campaign and other divestment initiatives; grassroots advocacy campaigns; speaking/organizing

tours and membership outreach; work within the broader peace and justice movement; media and resource development; and legal education initiatives. The report also highlights staff and office transitions, and accomplishments of the Steering and Advisory Committees. The report also contains a financial report for 2005 and a budget for 2006.

The introductory session also included an informative report-back on the Caterpillar campaign presented by representatives of member organizations of the US Campaign which have been working to end CAT bulldozer sales to the Israeli army. Delegates to the US Campaign's 4th Annual National Organizers' Conference voted to adopt the Caterpillar campaign as an overarching theme for the work of the US Campaign in 2005-2006.

The following presenters, representing groups from around the country, shared insights into the progress made to pressure Caterpillar to end bulldozer sales to the Israeli military:

* Matt Gaines, Stop CAT Coalition, Chicago: Matt showed an inspiring slide show of the successful actions done by the Stop CAT Coalition, which included civil disobedience, during the National Day of Action, March 16th, where five members of the coalition were arrested. Matt also showed pictures of the CAT Annual Shareholder meeting where the Corries confronted CAT CEO James Owens for the first time since a CAT bulldozer killed their daughter Rachel in 2003.

* Casey Currie: Casey discussed how Michigan-based Palestinian solidarity groups came together in March to meet with the CEO, COO, and CFO of a local CAT distributor in Novi, Michigan. Casey described the meeting as particularly successful because of the delegation's diversity.

* Nitin Sawhney, Boot CAT, Boston: Nitin shared Boot CAT's web site and walked the audience through its different pages. He pointed out that the web site is a critical component of Boot CAT's advocacy efforts in the Northeast region. Nitin also mentioned Boot CAT's regional day of action where they organized a protest at 13 different MILTON CAT distributors throughout the Northeast.

* Sydney Levy, Jewish Voice for Peace, San Francisco: Sydney shared the developments of shareholder activism led by JVP. The resolution submitted this year by JVP received the greatest amount of support—at 26%—than previous resolutions.

* Anna Marie Murano, Olympia-Rafah Sister City Project, Olympia: Anna Marie shared the work done in Olympia, Washington, the location of Rachel Corrie's university, Evergreen State. Anna Marie described the formation of a new coalition to wage the CAT Campaign in Olympia as well as their major protest organized on the National Day of Action in March.

OPENING PLENARY SESSION: POLITICAL ANALYSIS & ACTION

Two outstanding speakers analyzed the current political situation and contextualized it in the work and plans of the US Campaign:

* Nancy Murray, US Campaign Advisory Committee member, delivered an insightful analysis of Israel's "convergence" plan for Bantustans in the West Bank and drew on lessons learned by the global anti-apartheid movement to frame a message for confronting Israel's apartheid policies.

* Phyllis Bennis, US Campaign Advisory Committee member, provided an expert overview of the global movements for Palestinian human rights in particular and the global movements for justice in general and provided recommendations for how the US Campaign can center its work within these global movements.

Following the panel presentations, conference attendees discussed these and other relevant political issues.

MEMBER GROUP-LED FORUMS

Following lunch, conference attendees chose to attend one of six member group-led forums. Each forum was led by a cluster of US Campaign member groups working on a particular theme. The goal of the forums was to establish stronger collaboration between activists and groups working on a particular theme and to brainstorm how the US Campaign can facilitate future collaboration.

The member group-led forums were:

- 1) *Delegations to Israel/Palestine*—Interfaith Peace Builders, Global Exchange, American Friends Service Committee Olive Harvest Program: The delegations group discussed ways to increase their collaboration. One suggestion is to share their databases, to help one another in their outreach efforts, and to coordinate their post-delegation activism in the States.
- 2) *Congressional Advocacy*—American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Washington, DC-Area Chapter, Rebuilding Alliance, Committee for a Just Peace in Israel/Palestine: The group decided to coordinate monthly conference calls wherein constituents can speak with their Representatives regarding US foreign policy as it concerns Palestine and Israel.
- 3) *Media*—Imagine-Life, Palestine Media Watch, Americans United for Palestinian Human Rights, If Americans Knew: The media group acknowledged that many resources have been created to support media advocacy work—the organizing gap is perhaps in the lack of a clearinghouse for these resources. The group agreed to continue conversations and to create such a clearinghouse as well as produce more resources in concert.
- 4) *CAT/Divestment*—Boot CAT, Stop CAT, Olympia CAT, Mich CAT, Jewish Voice for Peace: The CAT/divestment group agreed on a goal and two tactics to achieve them. The goal is to change CAT policies in terms of its sales to Israel and to use it as a successful example of the BDS campaign in the United States. The two tactics agreed upon to achieve this goal are tarnishing CAT's image and engaging the corporation. The group also agreed to step up the campaign by choosing one institutional or consumer target and to wage a concerted divestment and/or boycott campaign from that target.
- 5) *Solidarity Groups*—International Solidarity Movement, Michigan Peace Team, Christian Peace Maker Team, International Women's Peace Team: The solidarity group agreed to increase their coordination by thinking of creative ways to highlight Israel's arbitrary policies of refusing entry to solidarity delegations.
- 6) *Churches & Morally Responsible Investment*—This group demystified what actually happened at the PC(USA) General Assembly meeting in June 2006. The group also discussed the ongoing efforts of the Methodist Church to support a divestment initiative. The group decided that churches needed to engage in greater collaboration with interfaith and political allies to address churches throughout the United States. This work will include resource production and the development of a speakers' bureau.

BUSINESS MEETING

Proposals for the conference were submitted by the [Boston Coalition for Palestinian Rights](#), the [Huron Valley Greens](#), and the [WESPAC Foundation](#). Presenters of proposal had ten minutes to explain their proposal after which up to five pro and five con statements on that proposal were entertained from the floor. After discussion and debate on the three proposals, accredited voting delegates from member organizations in good standing voted to adopt one proposal as the framework for the US Campaign's work for the upcoming year.

Voting delegates adopted the Boston Coalition for Palestinian Rights proposal, which garnered 75 votes. The Huron Valley Greens proposal received 6 votes and the WESPAC Foundation proposal

received 2 votes.

The proposal commits the US Campaign to an anti-apartheid framework and common language in its work for the upcoming year. The operative part of the proposal, as amended during the business meeting by BCPR, is reprinted below:

Since the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) call was made on July 9, 2005 by Palestinian civil society, prominent South Africans have urged the international solidarity community to make the connection between the system of apartheid that was the target of their world-wide anti-apartheid movement and the new apartheid (which several South Africans have termed 'worse than apartheid') taking shape in Israel/Palestine. There is now a South African-initiated call for an international conference on this theme to be held in London in the summer of 2007. It is recognized that a strong US-based campaign presence is essential if this conference is to become a building block in the creation of an international movement against Israeli apartheid.

This proposal would enable the US Campaign to play that role, to expand its capacity to educate, bring new allies on board, and invigorate the work individual groups are doing on BDS by:

1. Resolving to adopt the language of apartheid and Jim Crow segregation in describing Israeli policies towards Palestinians;
2. Maintaining its CAT focus while expanding campaign targets to include, where feasible, divestment from Israel Bonds and a product boycott;
3. Creating a committee which will research the potential targets for a consumer product boycott.

Following the vote on the proposals, participants in the member group-led forums gave report-backs to the plenary which highlighted the discussions that took place and proposed concrete next steps for collaboration between member groups of the US Campaign.

CULTURAL EVENT

On Saturday evening, conference attendees traveled to the Lebanese Heritage Center in Dearborn for a cultural event featuring food and drink, poetry, music, art, and dance. Conference attendees were treated to outstanding performances by:

- * Kathy Engel, poet and founding director of MADRE, and Danny Glover, humanitarian activist and actor, who read poetry
- * Khaled Mattawa, a Libyan-born writer and Assistant Professor of English at the University of Michigan, who read from his work
- * Invincible, a Detroit-based emcee, who performed social change-inspiring hip-hop
- * Iron Sheik, a Palestinian-American hip-hop artist
- * Amer Zahr, a Detroit-based activist, who played the oud

The evening also included group debka dancing and a collective art project led by Doolab.

Felicia Eaves, Chair of Black Voices for Peace and a Steering Committee member of the US Campaign, presented outgoing Steering Committee members David Wildman and Nadia Hijab with the 1st Annual Damu Smith Memorial Activist Award. Damu was the founder of Black Voices for Peace and a former Steering Committee member of the US Campaign who died earlier this year of cancer. The Damu Smith Memorial Activist Award will be given to individuals who exemplify Damu's commitment to peace, justice, and human rights.

STEERING COMMITTEE NOMINATIONS & ELECTIONS

On Sunday morning, conference attendees had the opportunity to hear from nominees who stood for election to the US Campaign's Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is the highest decision-making body of the US Campaign between annual conferences and is composed of 12 people serving in their individual capacities. Steering Committee members are elected to rotating three-year terms.

Five seats on the Steering Committee were open for election at the conference. Four Steering Committee members—Felicia Eaves (Black Voices for Peace), Nadia Hijab (human rights advocate), Ceanna Stephens (Global Exchange), and David Wildman (General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church)—completed their elected term on the Steering Committee. A fifth seat was open due to the resignation of Bill Fletcher (labor activist) from the Steering Committee, who subsequently rejoined the Advisory Committee.

The top four vote-getters were elected to full three-year terms on the Steering Committee; the fifth highest vote-getter was elected to fill the remaining two years of the seat last held by Bill Fletcher.

Ten candidates (organizational affiliations are for identification purposes only) were nominated to compete for the five open Steering Committee seats. They were:

- * Phyllis Bennis, Institute for Policy Studies
- * Joe Carr, Citizens for Justice in the Middle East
- * Felicia Eaves, Black Voices for Peace
- * Diane Ford Jones, Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ
- * Matt Gaines, Stop CAT Coalition
- * Abraham Greenhouse, Palestine Freedom Project
- * Henry Herskovitz, Jewish Witnesses for Peace and Friends
- * Matt Horton, American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, DC-Area Chapter
- * Nitin Sawhney, Boston to Palestine, Boot CAT, Tawassul
- * David Wildman, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church

After all of the candidates introduced themselves, ballots were distributed to accredited voting delegates, who had until the end of lunch to cast their votes.

In the afternoon, the Elections Committee, consisting of Samir Moukaddam (Steering Committee member), Nancy Murray (Advisory Committee member), Nabil Sater (local host committee), and Omar Masri (staff liaison), announced the results of the elections. The top four vote-getters receiving three-year terms were, in alphabetical order: Phyllis Bennis, Felicia Eaves, Diane Ford Jones, and David Wildman. Nitin Sawhney was the fifth highest vote-getter and was elected to fill the remaining two years of the vacant position. The new Steering Committee held a brief get-to-know-you meeting after the conference on Sunday afternoon.

Current Steering Committee members of the US Campaign, followed by the year in which their terms end, are:

- * Huwaida Arraf (2007) - [International Solidarity Movement](#)
- * Phyllis Bennis (2009) - [Institute for Policy Studies](#)
- * Felicia Eaves (2009) - [Black Voices for Peace](#)

- * Amie Fishman (2008) - [Jewish Voice for Peace](#)
- * Diane Ford Jones (2009) - [Justice & Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ](#)
- * Mark Lance (2007) - [SUSTAIN!](#) (Stop US Tax-Funded Aid to Israel Now)
- * Samir Moukaddam (2007) - [American Friends Service Committee, Southeast Regional Office Middle East Peace Education Program](#)
- * Mazin Qumsiyeh (2007) - [Al-Awda, Connecticut](#)
- * Nitin Sawhney, PhD (2008) - [Boston to Palestine](#), [Boot CAT Campaign](#), [Tawassul](#)
- * Uda Walker (2008)
- * David Wildman (2009) - [General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church](#)

The US Campaign would like to thank the Elections Committee for their outstanding work and all of the candidates who ran for the Steering Committee for their commitment and willingness to serve the US Campaign.

GRASSROOTS TRAINING INSTITUTE

The US Campaign held a grassroots training institute on Sunday morning and afternoon to build the skills-set of activists and provide them with trainings to become more effective advocates in their communities. Conference attendees selected one morning and one afternoon session in which to participate.

The training sessions included:

- * Media: The New Frontier of Internet-Based Tools for Communicating, led by Mahaba Abbas Alwazir, Imagine-Life, and Cecilie Surasky, Jewish Voice for Peace
- * Divestment, led William Youmans and Matt Horton, Divestment Support Committee
- * Building Organizations, Coalitions, and Action Campaigns, led by Hany Khalil, United for Peace and Justice
- * Fundraising, led by Stephanie Roth, Klein & Roth Consulting
- * Technology & Palestine Solidarity Activism, led by Abraham Greenhouse, Palestine Freedom Project
- * Media: Public Relations 101—Getting into the Corporate Media, led by Mahaba Abbas Alwazir, Imagine-Life, and Cecilie Surasky, Jewish Voice for Peace
- * Congressional Advocacy, led by Josh Ruebner, US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation

The US Campaign would like to thank all of the fantastic volunteer trainers who put together an exceptional Grassroots Training Institute.

The US Campaign is in the process of editing audio and video presentations of these training sessions and will make them available to member groups as soon as they are completed.

CLOSING SESSION

At the closing session, the Elections Committee announced the results of the Steering Committee election (see above) and outgoing US Campaign Co-Chair Nadia Hijab gave a summary of the conference and its accomplishments. A video tribute to Damu Smith was screened as well.

THANK YOUS

The US Campaign would like to extend a special thank you to all the volunteers and friends who donated time and resources to make this conference possible.

Local Organizing Committee

Mariam Arraf, Barb Beesley, IHM, Karen Deslierres, Carolyn Kerwin, IHM, Twyla Meyer, Hasan Newash, Kim Redigan, Nabil Sater, Mary Thomas, Don Unis

Local Volunteers

Susan Bertoni, Rita Carey, Sonia Harb, Rosina Hassoun, Carol Kelly, IHM, Joan Kusak, IHM, Lindsay Motley, Joan Mumaw, IHM, Joe Shak, Catrina Stackpoole

Friends

Arab American National Museum, Tarek Baydoun, University of Michigan-Dearborn Student Government, Congress of Arab American Organizations, Dearborn Chamber of Commerce, Randy Dillard, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Steve Ghannam, Mosaic Design Group, Lebanese Heritage Club, Masri Sweets, Marygrove College, Palestine Office, Kay Siblani, Arab American News, Osama Siblani, Congress of Arab American Organizations, Amanda Toy, Hyatt Regency Dearborn.

CONFERENCE EVALUATIONS

On a scale of 1-5 (5 being the best), did this conference meet your expectations?

Average score: 4.43

On a scale of 1-5, were the sessions (panels, workshops, strategizing, etc.) useful?

Average score: 4.52

On a scale of 1-5, did you find conference preparation, the program, structure, location, and other logistics to be satisfactory?

Average score: 4.50

On a scale of 1-5, did this conference provide you with concrete ideas, skills, and tools for action when you return home?

Average score: 4.39