



An open letter to Gatestone Institute on its latest stories criticizing the World Council of Churches' Lenten campaign on water issues

Nina Rosenwald
President,
Gatestone Institute

Amb. John R. Bolton
Chairman,
Gatestone Institute

Geneva, 02/03/2016

Dear Nina Rosenwald,
Dear Ambassador Bolton,

We noted the articles published on the website of the Gatestone Institute that are deeply critical of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its Lenten campaign on water in Palestine. The Lenten campaign of the WCC is aimed at addressing critical water issues affecting the people of Palestine, particularly in the occupied territories, and we are disappointed in the reactions of the institute.

The Gatestone articles accuse the WCC of "[demonizing Israel](#)" and also accuse the WCC general secretary of [spreading lies](#) about Palestine's water situation.

We are very interested in meeting you and discussing these matters with you and your colleagues in detail. We would like to share more about the work we are doing. We do believe in two-way communication, and we wish to take the opportunity to invite you to learn more about the WCC's work, particularly in this area.

As you know, the WCC was established in 1948. [WCC is a fellowship of Christian churches](#) around the world representing half a billion Christians, and is committed to the cause of Christian unity and, in that spirit, to "breaking down barriers between people, seeking justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation."

As God stands by the oppressed and marginalized, the WCC seeks with its member churches to stand by such people, wherever they are or whatever their faith tradition might be. It is with this conviction that WCC's [Ecumenical Water Network \(EWN\)](#) focused this year's Lenten campaign, [Seven Weeks for Water](#), on the situation in Palestine.

The EWN began in 2006, when the WCC assembly, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, engaged the issue in its [statement on "Water for Life"](#) and initiated a programme to address water issues around the world. Seven Weeks for Water, an annual Lenten campaign, has [since 2008](#) gathered weekly reflections and other resources on water. This campaign raises awareness around World Water Day on 22 March. We have used several different themes in our campaigns of past years, including the water privatization (e.g., water grabbing), the economics of water, Holy Water, water conflicts and just peace. The aim here is not to demonize Israel but to lift up the importance and urgency of the water situation in Palestine and to ask Christians everywhere to keep that situation in their prayers, their reflections, and their work for justice.

Likewise, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP), which you refer in your article, is not another organization but a guiding motif of the current work of the WCC and its member churches. It is a way for the WCC to address issues of justice and peace through a “pilgrimage,” that is, for Christians everywhere to see action for peace and justice as an inherent aspect of their lifelong journey of faith. This year the pilgrimage process has as its focus on the Middle East with specific reference to Israel and Palestine. In the reference group of the PJP, we have representatives from Jewish and Muslim communities.

The Gatestone articles claim that several facts and figures, statistics cited by us in our Lenten campaign on water, are “lies” as used by “Palestinian propagandists” and that we have failed to include Israeli viewpoints on water issues in Palestine. The information and statistics we employ in the campaign are derived from United Nations sources. None are from the Palestinian Water Authority.

Instead of attacking the WCC for raising pertinent questions about the unjust distribution of water in the occupied territories of Palestine — which is well recorded in the international bodies of the UN, such as [UNICEF](#) and the [OCHA](#), as well as the [World Bank](#), [Amnesty International](#), and many other [international journals](#) — why not devote energy and time in advocating with the Israeli government to address critical water issues in Palestine? Why not advocate for making the [Joint Water Committee](#) more functional to its purpose as stipulated in the Oslo II agreement?

Thank you for taking time to read our responses to some of your questions and remarks. We look forward to meeting you either in our Ecumenical UN Office in New York City or in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva.

Sincerely,



Dinesh Suna
Coordinator, Ecumenical Water Network
World Council of Churches



Marianne Ejdersten
Director of Communication
World Council of Churches