

Women's Division Showcases Radical Speakers at Spring Board Meeting

By Liza Kittle, Press Representative, RENEW Network

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Two partisan, leftist speakers gave presentations to the Section of Christian Social Responsibility at the spring semi-annual board meeting of the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries held in Stamford, Connecticut, April 20-23, 2007. Excerpts from their speeches were later shown in a video presentation before the full plenary of Women's Division directors.

The Women's Division is the official, national policy-making body for United Methodist Women charged with program development and policy decisions for the organization. The 50 directors of the Division are elected in three categories: five jurisdictional presidents; forty elected at jurisdictional quadrennial meetings of United Methodist Women; five elected by the Women's Division.

Over the past 25 years, women within the United Methodist Church have questioned the liberal, partisan political and social policies of the Women's Division and the absence of Christ-centered, Scripturally orthodox program material. Membership and financial giving have steadily decreased over the past decade as women have left the organization to pursue other options in women's ministry. The RENEW Network, a grassroots organization of evangelical women within the United Methodist Church, has called for the reform and accountability of the Women's Division since 1989.

Speakers Phyllis Bennis and Jinan Shafiq Nakshabandi are examples of the left-leaning political/social, theological presenters often showcased at Women's Division-sponsored events. While the views presented are embraced by the Women's Division, they diverge greatly from those held by mainstream United Methodist Women.

Phyllis Bennis is a fellow with the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), a "progressive, multi-issue think-tank" founded in 1963, located in Washington, D.C. The IPS serves as a policy and research resource on issues pertaining to social justice, environmental justice, economic rights and peace-building.

Bennis is the director of an IPS project entitled, "The New Internationalism—Middle East, United Nations and U.S. Intervention." The project works primarily on two issues—Iraq and Palestine/Israel—focusing on a "new kind of UN-centered, democratic and people-based internationalism."

Ms. Bennis' presentation before the committee was a vitriolic assault on the United States' government and military. She described her work as "focusing on U.S. unilateralism and global war," which she said is driven by the United States' desire for control of people and resources around the world. According to Ms. Bennis, this "global war" is being fought currently on two fronts by the United States, with the "intersection of its dual occupations"—the active one in Iraq and the enabling one in Palestine.

Bennis denounced the U.S. "special relationship" with Israel, which she describes as a means of economic, military and political control of the Middle East. Although of Jewish descent, Ms. Bennis'

position is vehemently partisan and supportive only of the Palestinian people. The suicide bombings and attacks by Palestinians against the Israeli people were condemned, but only in a retaliatory context, and blame was placed on—you guessed it—the United States for providing financial, military and political support for Israel.

Ms. Bennis promoted an upcoming rally in Washington, “The World Says NO to Israeli Occupation,” to be held June 10-11, 2007. The rally is sponsored by the U.S. Campaign to End the Occupation, an organization of which Ms. Bennis is director. The Women’s Division is a founding member, an active participant and supporter of this organization. Money from the mission giving of United Methodist Women is donated to this group yearly. (See Financial File IV, available from the RENEW Network at www.renewnetwork.org.)

It was voted that the Women’s Division would pay for four directors to participate in the rally (with UMW funding), and encourage United Methodist Women to actively participate.

Ms. Bennis also called for an immediate withdrawal of all troops from Iraq and for the United States to pay reparations to the people of Iraq to cover the cost of rebuilding their “destroyed country.”

While United Methodist Women are divided on many political issues, the extremely partisan viewpoints and anti-U.S. rhetoric of Ms. Bennis would clearly offend many of the organization’s members.

The second speaker, Jinan Nakshabandi, is an Iraqi woman currently living in Jordan. Nakshabandi is a local United Nations’ Volunteer, working with Bedouin women in Safawi, Jordan, teaching them computer skills. Ms. Nakshabandi gave a presentation entitled “Living in the Shadow of Saddam,” in which she described how much better life was in her country under the rule of Saddam Hussein. Free public education, equal legal rights for women and public displays of religion were cited as positives under Saddam. The negatives under Saddam—suppressed political parties, control of the media and freedom of movement—were downplayed.

As a press representative for RENEW, I asked Ms Nakshabandi a few questions about her presentation. When asked about the rape rooms, mass graves, torture and genocide against the Kurdish people, Ms. Nakshabandi said that the media distorted Iraqi life under Sadaam. When asked about all the liberated Iraqis holding up their blue fingers after voting for the first time, Ms. Nakshabandi responded, “elections are not always fair—look at your election of George Bush.”

During the plenary session, Ms. Nakshabandi presented a short litany and made this statement about Christians, Muslims and Jews: “Well, we all worship the same God.” Resounding applause erupted from the people in the room.

The pluralistic theology and partisan political ideology of the Women’s Division was evident at the spring board meeting and permeates the programs, policies and spending of the Women’s Division for United Methodist Women. Quotations from Scripture and the United Methodist *Book of Resolutions* provided support for the actions approved by the directors of the Women’s Division.