

What follows is a letter sent by several disaffected ICPJ members and former members. It does not represent the perspectives or opinions of ICPJ. It is offered here in the interest of transparency and honesty. To read the ICPJ response to this letter, please visit: <http://www.icpj.net/2007/12/07/icpj-a-strong-record/>

An Open Letter to the Southeastern Michigan Peace Community: *(The signers below are all present or former members of the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice (ICPJ) in Ann Arbor.)*

If you have not done so already, many of you will soon be receiving a year-end request for financial support from ICPJ. While ICPJ has had a long and productive history of being in the forefront of peace and justice issues in our community for over 40 years, sadly, this is no longer the case. We urge you to reject the present support request for the following reasons:

- 1) ICPJ is no longer *interfaith*. Since its inception, ICPJ has been welcoming of all faiths and has striven to be responsive to the special peace concerns inherent in differing beliefs. However, over the last few years, ICPJ has been unresponsive to our Muslim colleagues, and as a result, out of the approximately 300 members of ICPJ, an examination of the membership rolls of ICPJ found but a single Muslim. There is no Muslim (or other non-Christian/Jewish) representation on the Steering Committee or among the officers of ICPJ--these bodies are exclusively Christian and Jewish. Even the Catholic participation has been significantly reduced.
- 2) ICPJ is unresponsive to the priorities of its membership. In a December 2006 survey (129 respondents), the members designated the following six items as "one of the most important areas" for ICPJ action over the next two years: (*in order*) Economic justice/poverty (83%), Iraq War (75%), Cost of war vs. social spending (71%), Hunger issues (66%), Israeli/Palestinian conflict (61%), Racial justice (60%) and Universal access to healthcare (59%). All other issues drew less than 50% of the vote. When asked how many members would be willing to work on these issues, the priorities (*in order*) were: Israeli/Palestinian conflict (34 members), Economic justice/poverty (30), Hunger issues & Racial justice (tie at 24) and Iraq War & Cost of war vs. social spending (tie at 22). As you will note below, these priorities have been ignored by the current leadership of ICPJ.
- 3) ICPJ is no longer a significant activist organization. In calendar year 2007, ICPJ has issued six action alerts to its community (see <http://www.icpj.net/category/action-alert/> for details). They were:
 - a) Newsflash: Easter Bunny Choose Fair Trade Chocolate (March 28, 2007)
 - b) Curate! Don't Proliferate! Say No to New Nukes! (May 2, 2007)
 - c) Demand Accountability: Extradite "Goni" (May 22, 2007)

d) Message to Michigan: Don't Cut Social Services (May 30, 2007)

e) Now is the time: Call Congress to Close the SOA/WHINSEC (June 19, 2007)

f) Call Sen. Stabenow to Fund Food Stamps (September 26, 2007)

While no one doubts that these are all worthy efforts, even the "Easter Bunny Chocolates", it is difficult to discern how, *in toto*, they satisfy the membership's stated priorities. You will look in vain for any rigorous action related to the Iraq war, the cost of war vs. social spending, or the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. In a time of unprecedented turmoil within the body politic, in a time when the current President of the United States has borrowed from our children and grandchildren more money than all previous presidents combined, in a time when Gulf War II is approaching the date (July 21, 2008) when it will be of greater duration than our involvement in WWI and WW2 combined listed above are what the current ICPJ leadership has seen as its action priorities.

4) ICPJ is a secretive, top-down organization overly concerned with fundraising. Please note the action items from agenda from the last (11/13/07) two-hour ICPJ Steering Committee meeting (which is typical of the agendas from each of the monthly meetings this year): *a. Hiring Committee update, b. Finance report, c. Fundraising report, d. Draft Code of Conduct, e. By-laws Committee, f. Program Review Committee, g. Executive [secret] session.* Note that not one of these items relates to the priorities of the membership delineated in Item 2. Two of the items relate to the financial status of ICPJ. Four of the items relate to the structure of ICPJ. The last item is a secret meeting from which members are excluded. These "Executive Sessions", once described as dealing with "personnel issues", are now used to simply discuss items that the Steering Committee wishes, for whatever reasons, to conceal from its members. And these meetings are supplemented by private, no-members-allowed, meetings of the ICPJ officers and staff. It is unknown what occurs there. As former Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach wrote recently (11/20/07) in the New York Times, "*Secrecy always increases the risk of foolish mistakes.*"

Also please note the report of the "By-laws Committee" above. The history of the ICPJ by-laws has been chronicled elsewhere (contact Bill Thomson at wthomson@umich.edu for details). Suffice it to say that a committee of 11 individuals, comprising well over 50 years of ICPJ experience, worked diligently to construct a new set of By-Laws for ICPJ, presenting its report in February, 2005. This report was essentially dismissed, resulting in a fiasco at the last Annual Meeting in which it was unclear if the membership or the Steering Committee elected the President of the organization. (This item seems to us a fundamental issue to be clearly delineated in any by-laws worthy of the name.) The new By-Laws committee, as far as we can determine, consists of two individuals with perhaps 1 or 2 total years of experience with ICPJ.

5) ICPJ is not using its resources wisely or to the benefit of the peace and justice community. Through the end of October this year, ICPJ received \$77,455.05 in income. Of that amount, \$53,201.48 (68.7%) went directly to staff salaries, and \$8,797.58 (11.4%) went to the work of ICPJ Task Forces. We believe that this ratio is seriously askew. For this money, we have thus far received from ICPJ: 1) six “Action Alerts” (see Item 3 above), 2) ten movies, 3) five “Better World” breakfasts, 4) approximately nine presentations(nuclear weapons, poverty, Latin America), 5) eight jointly-sponsored events which, according to ICPJ Director Chuck Warpehoski, would have occurred anyway (“but not as well”) without ICPJ assistance, and 6) the Crop Walk and the Food Stamp Challenge. We can and should do better.

6) ICPJ is dangerously inbred. This is not a new issue, but the ICPJ leadership continues along its established path of recruiting friends to serve on the Steering Committee and in its elected offices. The Nominating Committee, from whom all nominations flow, is composed of identical individuals from year to year. This has resulted in an almost exclusively Christian and Jewish membership and power structure. Nominations are presented to the Annual Meeting without notification to the membership, and the membership is not allowed to question prospective officers or Steering Committee members, nor even to hear a list of qualifications. We are merely presented names (many of them unknown to the experienced peace and justice community) and asked for a vote.

Sadly, we see little hope for substantive changes in ICPJ under the current leadership, and we believe that the only way we can effect a change in the direction of ICPJ to its peace and justice roots is to withhold our financial support. Thus we are asking you to join us in suspending our financial support to the organization until ICPJ's priorities conform to the priorities of the membership and until the present procedures are replaced with ones that are open, transparent, and democratic and allow the ICPJ membership to participate fully in the election of members of the Steering Committee and the President, with proposals for new committee members coming from the membership as well as from the Steering Committee.

We maintain our love for ICPJ and its core values, and we greatly hope that ICPJ can arise from its current status to once again being a leading peace and justice organization in southeast Michigan and beyond.

Peace with Justice,

(signed)

Lee A. Booth – Former Member of ICPJ

Philip A. Booth – Former Member of ICPJ

Louie Leedle – Former Member of ICPJ

Thomas Saffold, former ICPJ Steering Committee President

Farouq Shafie, former ICPJ Steering Committee Member

Ellen Teller – Former Member of ICPJ

Bill Thomson – Current Member of ICPJ

(For any questions or additional information, and for suggested alternative local charities committed to peace and justice, please contact Bill Thomson, wthomson@umich.edu, 734-668-8479)