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Peace walk doesn't make it to final destination — New Haven mosque

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By Pamela McLoughlin, Register Staff

pmcloughlin@nhregister.com / Twitter: [@mcpamskids](https://twitter.com/mcpamskids)

NEW HAVEN — IWagePeace founder Bruce Barrett is so crazy about the concept of peace that he says it on billboards, made a documentary and brings former combatants from Israel and the Palestinian territories to speak in the area each year.

So it was quite the irony that Barrett upset his own IWagePeace walk and had to announce Monday evening to the hundreds who had gathered that they wouldn't be stopping by a mosque on George Street as planned.

Barrett had disrupted the peace by writing an OpEd piece that ran in the July 10 Register and raised some of the specific issues surrounding the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

He was balanced, those who read the piece said, but it's such an emotional issue that controversy erupted in the mosque, where many felt Barrett had "politicized" the walk.



This year the I Wage Peace Walk was held in New Haven beginning on the New Haven Green and had planned on visiting a Christian, Jewish and Muslim places of worship. The walkers included former combatants Israeli Erez Krispin, left, and Palestinian Nouraldin Shehada, right, holding a banner outside the Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale. Mara Lavitt/New Haven Register

He was asked not to bring the walk to the Masjid after all. Instead, the walkers Monday, including many Muslims, stopped at a small park near the Islamic center.

Despite the rumblings at the mosque, among the supporters was Masjid Islam board president Jimmy Jones, who was supposed to be off his feet for medical reasons, but felt so strongly about supporting Barrett's cause that he defied doctor's orders.

True to form, Barrett turned the situation into a teachable moment for his passion.

"Peacemaking is not easy work. ... If it were easy, everyone would do it," he said, addressing some 300 who gathered on the Green for his third annual walk, held the first two years in West Haven. "I am greatly saddened by this turn of events."

The plan was originally for the 300 or so walkers who gathered to stop at United Church on the Green, then the Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale and finally, Masjid al Islam mosque.

It was to be the ultimate symbolism for Barrett's cause to see Christians, Muslims and Jews get along on a human level, walk together and talk in hopes that fear and hate would dissolve.



...walkers included Rev. Gary Witte, pastor of Woodmont United Church of Christ in Milford. Mara Lavitt/New Haven Register

Jones, a Middle East peacemaker of 20 years, addressed the crowd, saying he felt he had to be there to apologize because one of the core values of Islam is neighborliness. He invited people to services anytime and said he encourages Jews, Muslims and Christians to share with one another.

"We haven't used our resources to bring peace in the Middle East," Jones said, reciting one of his favorite sentiments from civil rights leader Malcolm X: "I am for truth no matter who speaks it. I am for justice, no matter who it's for or against."

Jones said it always gets difficult when details of the Middle East situation are discussed as they were in Barrett's OpEd piece because people, "hear it through their emotions."

He said the issue is "like a Rorschach test," referring to a psychological test in which subjects' perceptions of inkblots are recorded and then analyzed.

Barrett, who remained his usual energized and enthusiastic self, despite the setback, said, "It is not uncommon for houses of worship to eschew politics."

"Jews for Justice and Peace, who support our walk, represent members of a synagogue that has opted not to place their name on the walk to avoid similar political controversy," Barrett said.

Barrett went on to say, "I am very pleased that many members of the Muslim community are walking with us."

He ended his talk from a stage on the Green with: "The walk will continue, the work will go on, peace be with you, Salaam and Shalom."

They are the words for "peace" in Arabic and Hebrew, respectively.

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http://www.nhregister.com/articles/2012/07/16/news/new_haven/doc5004d76f45e2d908312939.prt



...The walkers included James Linn of Milford. Mara Lavitt/New Haven Register

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