

August 25, 2015

Reverend Jordan Cantwell
Moderator
The United Church of Canada
3250 Bloor Street West, Suite 300
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4

Dear Reverend Cantwell,

We are writing to express our disappointment and offense that the 42nd General Council of the United Church of Canada (UCC) has decided to use divestment tactics against Israelis.

As rabbis representing congregations across denominational lines, we have spent years engaged in interfaith partnerships to strengthen civil discourse in Canada. We are saddened that the General Council has again taken steps that cause grievous damage to Jewish-Christian relations.

The General Council fails to see that boycott and divestment measures against Israelis do nothing to advance peace and support the legitimate aspirations of both sides. Coexistence, reconciliation, and economic cooperation are the building blocks of peace; in contrast, boycotts destroy Israeli-Palestinian partnerships, undermine goodwill, and encourage hardliners.

Boycott and divestment tactics ignore the terrible suffering of Israelis caused by Hamas, Hezbollah, and missile attacks against Israel, which are not mentioned even once in the 42nd General Council's workbook or resolutions. Moreover, they do nothing to address the real suffering and challenges experienced by Palestinians, particularly considering the more than 70,000 Palestinians who work in Israel or for Israeli employers in the West Bank every day – and who are no less victims of boycotts-divestment-sanctions (BDS).

A boycott movement targeting the State of Israel implies that resolving the very complex Israeli-Palestinian dispute is the sole responsibility of but one party. No objective or rational reading of the situation could possibly result in that conclusion. Rather than being rooted in peace, boycotts against Israel have been historically used as a tool of conflict by Middle Eastern states that sought Israel's destruction long before 1967.

The General Council's 2012 boycott campaign gave the organized Jewish community (the Centre for Israel Jewish Affairs [CIJA], our partner and the advocacy agent of the Jewish Federations of Canada) no choice but to sever ties with the General Council and the national office of the UCC. This month's General Council decision ensures that

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relations remain ruptured and, for now, irreparable. We will continue to strengthen relations with UCC congregations and ministers who share our profound disappointment with the General Council's policy.

Although the General Council has expressed support for trust-building efforts among Christians, Jews, and Palestinians, these statements are utterly incongruous with the decision to expand support for BDS. Coercion and punitive measures are the antithesis of trust-building and cooperation. The Canadian Rabbinic Caucus will not engage in dialogue or partnerships with those who embrace the very tactics, such as BDS, that undermine dialogue and destroy partnerships between Israelis and Palestinians.

The General Council is shamefully blind to the dishonesty and hypocrisy of the BDS movement, as well as the fact that BDS is exclusively and extremely anti-Israel. It cannot be overlooked that no other country in the region is being boycotted by the UCC. Many in our community view the current boycott as a modern manifestation of the world's "oldest hatred", in light of the long history of anti-Judaism by Christian authorities.

By associating itself with this unbalanced and unjust ideology, the UCC loses all credibility with Israelis and the Jewish community. As an unfortunate result, the Canadian Jewish community cannot return to the table with a Church once esteemed as a force for social justice, peace, and human rights.

Sincerely,

The Canadian Rabbinic Caucus

Co-Chair Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl, Toronto
Co-Chair Rabbi Jonathan Infeld, Vancouver
Co-Chair Rabbi Reuben Poupko, Montreal

cc:

Nora Sanders, General Secretary, United Church of Canada
The United Church of Canada Observer
The Canadian Jewish News

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