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UM Kairos Response Announces Support of Rabbinical Council

United Methodist Kairos Response is pleased to announce support from members of the Jewish Voice for Peace Rabbinical Council for its proposal to align the church's investments with its resolutions on Israel/Palestine. The rabbis' letter stated: "Many of us in the Jewish community recognize that the continuing occupation of Palestine itself presents a great danger to the safety of the Jewish people, not to mention oppressing our spirits and diminishing our honor in the world community. We appreciate the solidarity of people of conscience in pursuing conscientious nonviolent strategies, such as phased selective divestment, to end the occupation."

(www.Rabbisletter.org)

According to UMKR convener Rev. John Wagner, "the endorsement of these rabbis and many Jewish groups reminds us that struggles for equality and human rights have always been interfaith endeavors. Efforts to end Israel's occupation, like the Civil Rights struggles that came before, have brought together people of many faiths committed to justice. Deep and lasting interfaith friendships are being forged as we work together for the freedom of our fellow human beings."

Delegates at General Conference in late April will answer a simple question: **Should the church invest its own funds in an occupation it opposes?** Though ending Israel's occupation has long been an official goal of the church, some of its boards and agencies hold investments in companies that sustain it. UMKR would remove that contradiction by divesting church funds from Caterpillar (which has helped destroy more than 26,000 Palestinian homes, water cisterns, and almost a million olive trees), Motorola Solutions (which provides mobile communications for occupation forces and protects the illegal settlements with radar systems) and Hewlett Packard (which provides biometric monitoring applied only to Palestinians at checkpoints built illegally on Palestinian land). These companies have been engaged for years by United Methodists and ecumenical partners, and asked to sever their ties to occupation.

The UMKR measure has already received statements of support from two of the church's general agencies, six major ethnic caucuses, seven annual conferences, all UM mission personnel in the Holy Land, and hundreds of Israelis, Palestinians, and United Methodists from all over the world.ⁱ This widespread support reflects a growing awareness that the occupation and settlements must end before peace can be achieved.

The proposal addresses only companies sustaining the occupation, and does not call for divestment from Israel. Rev. Bart Beavin, who once worked for the UM Pension Board, said, "Like every investor, the church has the right and moral responsibility to decide how her funds are used. United Methodists should not put money into companies that sustain the conditions of occupation and severe violations of human rights."

Connie Baker, a United Methodist from Illinois, has a similar view: "The church opposes gambling; we do not invest in casinos. The church opposes smoking; we do not invest in tobacco companies. In 2004, 98% of the delegates at the church's General Conference voted to oppose the occupation. We should not invest in it."

At present, United Methodist pastors who have spent their lives working for justice are receiving pensions derived in part from the oppression of Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land. This is a situation that many cannot accept. Rev. Michael Yoshii of California is among them. According to Rev. Yoshii, "Divestment is not intended to be the whole solution, but it's our part. It's addressing what the church can do within its own realm of responsibility. If we ask others not to support an illegal situation, we had better make sure that we are not supporting it ourselves."

Though **the primary goal of the divestment legislation is to be sure the church is not profiting from the occupation**, history has shown that divestment can change company behavior. On June 21, 2010, the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* reported that targeted or selective divestment of the kind proposed by UMKR was already playing a role in convincing companies to move out of the West Bank.ⁱⁱ When companies leave the industrial zones attached to illegal settlements, the settlers may look elsewhere for their jobs and leave the Palestinian territories, where their presence is a violation of international law. All Palestinian labor unions have endorsed divestment as a means to end the occupation.

As the occupation ends, there is no doubt investment will be needed in the Palestinian economy. Yet no economy can prosper without freedom of movement for workers and goods, reliable and affordable water, or access to markets, land and raw materials. The occupation denies all these to Palestinians. As long as United Methodist investments are helping to sustain the occupation, and thereby strangle the Palestinian economy, putting more money into businesses there can do little to help. Investment in Palestine may sound "positive," but it turns a blind eye to the reality of the occupation and the suffocating effect it has on Palestinians' lives and economy. **Only if we combine investment in Palestine with divestment from companies that sustain the occupation** will we make a difference for peace.

About United Methodist Kairos Response: United Methodist Kairos Response is a global United Methodist movement working to put actions behind the denomination's words supporting an end to the Israeli occupation and a just peace in Israel/Palestine. It was formed in response to the Kairos Palestine Document, an urgent cry from Palestinian Christians to the global church, asking for action to end Israel's occupation of land beyond its internationally recognized borders.

ⁱ https://www.kairosresponse.org/Group_Endorsements.html
https://www.kairosresponse.org/Endorsement_Statements.html#Israelis_Letter_Print

ⁱⁱ Remez, Didi: Targeted boycott and divestment pushing companies out of the settlements, *Ma'ariv*, 21 June 2010.
<http://coteret.com/2010/06/21/maariv-targeted-boycott-and-divestment-pushing-companies-out-of-the-settlements/>