

Aligning United Methodist Church Investments with Resolutions on Israel/Palestine

RATIONALE:

For more than 40 years, every United Methodist Church General Conference has endorsed calls for just and lasting peace for all Israelis and Palestinians, including an end to all military sales to the whole region. Tragically, ongoing military occupation and expanding Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands have deepened a system of violence and discrimination that dehumanizes Palestinians and Israelis. The biblical mandate to be peacemakers demands that we express our love of our Palestinian and Israeli neighbors both in word and through nonviolent actions. (Matthew 5: 9, 1 John 3:17-18)

The Council of Bishops reminds us in God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action: "We love God and neighbor by challenging those who do harm. We must not only respond to the suffering already created, but also challenge people, companies, and governments that continue to exploit the weak, destroy the earth, perpetuate violence, and generate more weapons. We follow Jesus' example of confronting authorities nonviolently using the force of love."

Palestinian Christians have implored Christians everywhere to put actions behind their words to end Israel's occupation of Palestinian land, which is destroying their lives (Kairos Palestine Document).ⁱ Although The United Methodist Church has long opposed the occupation, The United Methodist Church boards and agencies still hold stock in companies that sustain it.ⁱⁱ

In 1996, The United Methodist Church General Conference declared that "continuing efforts by the State of Israel to build settlements in the occupied territories violate both international law and the spirit of the Declaration of Principles [the Oslo peace process]."ⁱⁱⁱ The 2004 General Conference approved a resolution opposing "confiscation of Palestinian land ... the continued building of illegal Jewish settlements, and any vision of a 'Greater Israel' that includes the occupied territories and the whole of Jerusalem and its surroundings."^{iv}

The United Methodist Church Book of Discipline discourages investment in companies "that directly or indirectly support the violation of human rights" (§716).^v Palestinian human rights are violated by companies that sustain illegal settlements, segregated roads, checkpoints, the separation wall, home demolitions and other realities of the occupation.

Researchers with the General Boards of Global Ministries, Pensions and Health Benefits, and Church and Society, several annual conferences, and ecumenical partners have identified a limited number of US and international companies that sustain Israel's occupation.^{vi} United Methodists have engaged Caterpillar, Motorola, and Hewlett Packard on this issue for years and have asked them to end their involvement with the occupation.

The Book of Discipline requires consideration of divestment when companies do not respond to corporate engagement with changed practices (§716).^{vii} At the October 2010 Socially Responsible Investing (SRI) Summit, the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits stated that SRI measures it has employed in the past, including screening and divestment, have not violated the board's fiduciary responsibility to beneficiaries.

Divestment is not aimed at Israel itself, but at the occupation of land beyond its internationally recognized borders. As a non-violent moral action, divestment seeks to strengthen the Church's support for the peoples of Israel and Palestine, whose future can only be secured through a just peace. Even if such an action resulted in a lesser financial return, we believe our moral mandate overrides financial gain.

Many faith groups and organizations around the world have already divested or publicly support divestment.^{viii} The Church should lead with prophetic action by publicly and promptly aligning its investments with longstanding church policies opposing the Israeli occupation. Such action is supported by mission personnel who have served in the Holy Land since the 1990s.

ACTION:

In light of our theological discernment of moral and biblical justice, the General Conference calls on The United Methodist Church to end its financial involvement in Israel's occupation by divesting from companies that sustain the occupation.

The General Conference

- instructs all United Methodist general boards and agencies to divest promptly from Caterpillar, Motorola and Hewlett Packard, which have been engaged repeatedly by United Methodist agencies and annual conferences on this issue, until these companies end their involvement in the Israeli occupation.
- calls on all United Methodist general boards and agencies to immediately engage with other companies in their portfolios that have been identified by researchers in United Methodist agencies and annual conferences as being involved in the occupation.^{ix} If these companies do not change their involvement within two years, they should be removed from United Methodist portfolios.
- requires all United Methodist general boards and agencies to provide updates on their websites regarding the process of corporate engagement with and/or divestment from companies that support the Israeli occupation.
- directs all United Methodist general boards and agencies to provide a report to the 2016 General Conference regarding their progress toward complying with this resolution.

- calls on The United Methodist Church boards and agencies, annual conferences, local churches and individuals to prayerfully consider corporate involvement in Israel's occupation when making investment decisions.
- encourages United Methodists to partner with Jews, Christians, Muslims and other people of conscience working for corporate accountability, human rights and an end to the occupation.

i Kairos Palestine. "A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love From the Heart of Palestinian Suffering" www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf Web. 1 May 2010.

ii Holy Land Task Force. "Companies of Concern" www.umhltf.org/Companies_of_Concern.html Web. November 2010.

iii General Board of Global Ministries. "Two Resolutions of The United Methodist Church on the Middle East: The Building of Settlements in Occupied Territories." www.gbgm-umc.org/middle_east/Jerusalem.html Web. 1996. As cited in The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2000. "214. Israel-Palestine Conflict – The Building of Settlements in the Occupied Territories." (Abingdon Press), 732.

iv United Methodist Church. "Opposition to Israeli Settlements on Palestinian Land" http://archives.umc.org/interior_print.asp?ptid=4&mid=6855 Web 2004. As cited in The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2004. "312. Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land." (Abingdon Press), 789.

v The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2008. "Socially Responsible Investments" (Abingdon Press), 492.

vi "Companies of Concern."

vii "Socially Responsible Investments," 492.

viii Interfaith Peace Initiative. "Global Actions to End the Israeli Occupation" www.interfaithpeaceinitiative.com/globalactions.pdf Web July 2010.

ix "Companies of Concern."