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United Methodists in U.S. Defend the Right to Boycott and Divest

Twenty-three resolutions from fifteen regional church bodies' 2017 resolutions also denounce abuse of Palestinian children under the Israeli occupation; support the international HP Boycott, encourage investment in church equities fund that screens occupation-complicit companies, and promote responsible tourism in the Holy Land.

July 12, 2017 – In May and June 2017, seven United Methodist annual conferences (regional bodies) with demographically and politically diverse constituencies approved resolutions [defending the right](#) to invest church funds according to their values and to address situations of injustice with organized boycotts. These resolutions specifically oppose state and federal legislation that attempts to “stifle the movement toward justice for Palestinians” by penalizing support for nonviolent economic actions such as boycott and divestment that imply criticism of Israeli government policies.

United Methodists for Kairos Response (UMKR) commends these church bodies that have joined many Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faith partners in standing with the oppressed through socially responsible investing policies and boycotts of companies that perpetuate human rights abuses.

With a [total of 23 resolutions](#) adopted in fifteen regional bodies this year, United Methodists also have [supported the boycott of Hewlett Packard products](#) due to corporate involvement in many facets of the Israeli occupation (Baltimore-Washington, New England, and Upper New York), [encouraged investment in the church's Equities Social Values Plus Fund](#) which excludes such occupation-complicit companies as Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard and Motorola Solutions (California-Pacific, Northern Illinois, Susquehanna, New England and Upper New York), **opposed the abuse of Palestinian children living under occupation** (California-Nevada and Northern Illinois), [encouraged responsible Holy Land tourism that includes engaging with Palestinian Christians](#) (California-Pacific, Desert Southwest, Northern Illinois, and Virginia), created a **task force to study divestment options** in response to the Israeli occupation (East Ohio) and called for a peace process based on the **principles of “international law and human rights”** (Wisconsin).

Over the last 13 months, thousands of clergy and lay delegates representing over 1 million United Methodist Church members (based on data at www.umdata.org) have approved resolutions defending the right to boycott and divest: in 2017, the annual conferences of Minnesota, New England, Upper New York, Great Plains (Nebraska and Kansas), Desert Southwest (Arizona and Utah), Oregon-Idaho, and Florida; [in June and July 2016](#), the California-Nevada Annual Conference and the Western Jurisdictional Conference, which represents United Methodists in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

The United Methodist Church, a global denomination that is also the largest U.S. mainline church with roughly 7 million members in the United States, has consistently and publicly opposed the Israeli occupation since the 1980s and in recent years has taken positions and actions to support and engage in boycott of and divestment from the occupation. In 2012, [the denomination called](#) for “all nations to

prohibit: 1. any financial support by individuals or organizations for the construction and maintenance of settlements; and 2. the import of products made by companies in Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.” Beginning in 2014, the United Methodist agency Wespath Benefits and Investments (formerly the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits) has removed or barred investments in several businesses [including five Israeli banks and an Israeli construction company](#), due to their complicity in human rights violations stemming from the Israeli occupation. Several annual conferences have taken similar steps with their own investment funds.

All of these actions comply with longstanding church policy in [The United Methodist Book of Discipline](#), which provides doctrine and law for the denomination and which recommends nonviolent methods such as corporate engagement and exclusion as preferred means to achieve justice. It also instructs church institutions to invest church funds in accordance with United Methodist standards for human rights and socially responsible investing.

Other Christian denominations adopting policies of divestment from and boycott of the Israeli occupation in recent years include the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Unitarian Universalists and, just this month, the Mennonite Church USA.

These actions, along with [scores of divestment and boycott resolutions and actions](#) in recent years by labor unions, professional associations, investment and pension funds, local municipalities, and on college campuses, have angered supporters of Israel’s current policies, who have worked throughout the U.S. to pass laws that penalize or stigmatize those who endorse or engage in divestment and boycotts to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine. As of June 2017, [at least twenty states](#) have enacted such laws; similar legislation is pending in several other states and has been introduced in the U.S. Congress.

As the recent church resolutions have stated, despite these attempts to silence support for Palestinians’ human rights, “boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) are constitutionally protected forms of free speech and protest that have often been used by people of conscience to effect positive social and political change.” Others who have addressed the unconstitutionality of “anti-BDS legislation” include the Jewish Voice for Peace [Rabbinical Council](#), the [Center for Constitutional Rights](#), the [ACLU](#), [Abe Foxman](#), long-time former Director of the Anti-Defamation League, and [Americans for Peace Now](#), the U.S. affiliate of the Israeli organization, Peace Now.

[United Methodists for Kairos Response](#) (UMKR) is an international grassroots peace movement in the United Methodist Church responding to Palestinian Christians’ urgent call, in *Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth*, for effective action to end the Israeli occupation and achieve a just peace in the Holy Land. UMKR’s work includes advocacy for divestment and boycotts focused on ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, for government policies that support universal human rights and international law, and for responsible tourism in the Holy Land, as well as education about the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and current conditions in Israel/Palestine. UMKR seeks – through nonviolent action and in partnership with our Palestinian sisters and brothers in Christ – freedom, justice and equality for all Palestinians and Israelis.

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