

Report on United Methodist Corporate Research Trip to the West Bank, 2010

Introduction:

From February 15-28, 2010 four United Methodists from the California-Nevada and New England annual conferences traveled to the Holy Land to study companies that sustain Israel's occupation of Palestinian land. We did this with two goals in mind. The first was to advance our own understanding of the occupation and the role that corporations play in allowing it to continue. The second was to share our findings within our denomination and with others working for a just peace.

Our trip convinced us that a lasting peace must be a situation in which all parties feel secure and able to determine their own destinies. The subjugation of one group by another, which we witnessed in our travels, is not sustainable. It will never provide either party with the kind of mutual acceptance that allows people to live together.

The occupation does, however, provide a substantial income for many companies around the world. These companies often make donations to elected officials, who arrange taxpayer funding for products used to divide and confiscate land beyond Israel's borders. It is a situation that benefits politicians and corporations far more than it helps Israelis, and it actually endangers Americans.

We approached our task as people who care about our country, about Israel, and about Palestinians. As US citizens, we concluded that patriotism sometimes involves sharing uncomfortable truths with our government and our neighbors. We met with Jewish Israeli volunteers who provide research on companies that enable the occupation, and heard them describe how it threatens Israel's future as well as the future for Palestinians.

We also approached our trip as Christians who affirm all of God's creation. This means having equal concern for people of every faith, in every walk of life. Our journey was rich with opportunities for learning from many perspectives.

During our trip we had Communion and lunch with Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem and worshipped with Christians in Bethlehem. We met with a Holocaust survivor who lost a grandson to this conflict, Dahlia Landau (the protagonist of the book The Lemon Tree), a former Israeli soldier and other Jewish friends in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. We also spent time with Muslim families in the northern West Bank and in Bethlehem refugee camps. Our group visited more than a dozen different towns in the West Bank and several in Israel. We were able to see Christian holy sites in Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Galilee, in addition to documenting the role of companies in sustaining the occupation.

As we traveled, we saw many examples of products provided by corporations in which United Methodist agencies invest. We observed how these are used to strengthen the occupation, and we photographed some of these companies that maintain a presence in the settlements. We heard pleas from Palestinian Christians to put actions behind our *words* that oppose the occupation (*UM Book of Resolutions*, #312). We hope this report will enable readers to see relationships between the investment decisions of the United Methodist Church and an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Observations:

There were five things that stood out most for our group during the trip: (1) the increased repression and retaliation against nonviolent peace activists, (2) the tightening of the noose around Bethlehem, (3) increased restrictions on movement and segregation of roads, (4) the increased number of companies profiting from the occupation, and (5) the rapid spread of the settlements.

1. Increased repression of nonviolent protest

On Tuesday, February 23, we had lunch in Beit Sahour (east of Bethlehem) with Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh, a former Yale professor and friend of the group leader. His family has lived in the Bethlehem area for generations, and he has returned to care for his elderly mother. He took us to Osh Grab, a hill in Beit Sahour where there used to be an Israeli military installation. It has been abandoned for years, and a new playground and park have been built there for area families with international donations. Now the Israeli army has announced plans to re-open a base at Osh Grab as a prelude to establishing a new settlement overlooking the playground. The park will be declared a closed military zone and eventually this area, like so much of the rest of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour, will be taken over by settlers. Residents of the town had been gathering in silent protest for weeks.

The Sunday after we were there, Dr. Qumsiyeh and other Palestinians and internationals gathered at Osh Grab after church. They walked peacefully with children carrying a banner and some small flags. Suddenly, jeeps full of Israeli soldiers appeared in their midst. They blasted their horns, shouted in Hebrew, and threw tear gas canisters to disperse the crowd. The incident was filmed and is available on You Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4helvayLrfo>

Similar incidents are occurring throughout the West Bank. In the last two years, Israeli forces have killed eight people, including a ten-year old boy and two teenagers, at the sites of anti-wall demonstrations. They have injured scores of others, some very seriously. American citizens have been among those wounded and killed. It seems that the Israeli government knows how to deal with violent resistance, but is much more threatened by the growing nonviolent protest movement. As a result, they have been cracking down hard on the Palestinians who engage in marches or other demonstrations of resistance, and against the international volunteers who stand with them.



Children demonstrating at Osh Grab

We visited Bil'in, the site of weekly nonviolent protests for several years, and stood on the village farmland where a number of nonviolent protesters have been killed and wounded by Israeli soldiers. In the last two years, Israeli forces have killed eight people -- including a ten-year old boy and two teenagers -- at the sites of anti-wall demonstrations like the one in Bil'in. They have injured many more, some very seriously. Most Americans never hear about the nonviolent protest, which has been going on for decades and is far more common than the occasional violent acts that are emphasized and often distorted by the media.

The village of Jayyous, where a member of our group has close friends, has also held nonviolent demonstrations to protest Israel's taking of their farmland to build two settlements. Jayyous has been the object of many raids, where soldiers have taken over and vandalized homes, thrown tear gas into crowds and sometimes into houses, causing many health problems for the residents. Many of its young people have been arrested.



Spent ammunition left behind after Israeli raids on Jayyous. The tear gas was made by Federal Laboratories in Saltsburg, PA and Combined Systems Inc. in Jamestown, PA.

2. The Strangulation of Bethlehem



The wall next to a Christian chapel, Bethlehem

We had lunch with a Palestinian Christian family living on the road that used to connect Bethlehem with Jerusalem. Their shop was on that road and they made a good living selling to people who traveled the ancient route. Now the road is blocked with a notorious checkpoint through which Palestinians from the entire southern part of the West Bank must pass to reach their work in Jerusalem. This wall is not on Israel's border, but inside the town of Bethlehem. The family's view from the front and back windows of their home is dominated by the wall. Taxis begin depositing workers under their windows to wait in long lines at 4 am each day, waking the family from their sleep.



The separation wall in 2004, inside Bethlehem



The same section of the separation wall in 2010

The sight of the three story grey cement wall snaking its way through Bethlehem is profoundly disturbing. Those in our group who had visited the area before were astonished at the growth and intrusion of the wall deep inside the town. The challenge of getting from one part of Bethlehem to another and from Bethlehem to its neighboring villages or to the Palestinian part of Jerusalem is significant. It became clear to us that the wall is not placed in its current configuration for security, but that it annexes some of the most fertile land in the Bethlehem area to Israel. According to the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem, about 70% of the Bethlehem district's agricultural land has been annexed by Israel.



The wall inside Bethlehem

God works in mysterious ways, and an experience we first regarded as infuriating gave us a chance to understand some of the indignities Palestinians must endure each day. When we went into Jerusalem on February 25th, we took the same bus we had taken earlier in the week, which goes through a big modern checkpoint on the main road. There, passengers disembark and present their passports. It's a well known routine. This time, however, when we reached the checkpoint we were told tourists were no longer allowed to pass through it, and that we would have to take a taxi from the highway back to the other checkpoint in Bethlehem which has long lines and metal turnstiles and cattle chutes lined on both sides with metal fences. This is the checkpoint reserved for Palestinians.

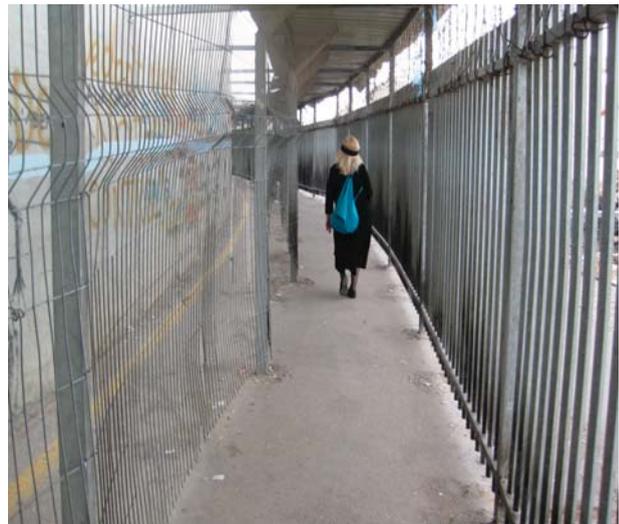
Despite the obvious fact that one of our group was blind and traveled with a white cane, we were left standing on the side of the road. It took us about two and a half hours to get out of Bethlehem. By the time we arrived we had missed our morning activities. A Protestant minister we met with in Jerusalem agreed that Israel is doing this to warn foreigners against visiting Bethlehem independently. Already

tourism has suffered greatly since Israel built its giant wall inside Bethlehem where it winds around and around through the town with menacing watch towers. Since so much of the farmland has been confiscated for settlements, tourism is the only industry that keeps Bethlehem alive, and this strangulation will have serious consequences for the families who live there.

The General Conference passed a resolution in 2009 urging travelers to stay at least one night in Bethlehem and recommending that they try to engage with ordinary Palestinians who share our faith. We need to publicize and encourage this requirement. There are many alternative tourism groups that can coordinate safe, productive visits to the area.



A member of our group talks with the soldier who turned us back at the main Bethlehem checkpoint.



We enter one of the long metal corridors at Bethlehem Checkpoint 300.

The wall and checkpoints make it impossible for Palestinian business owners to know if their employees can get to work on time or on a given day. Time spent waiting in lines adds to the cost of getting goods to market or importing raw materials. One member of our group had dinner with a business owner who had to close his company, laying off 120 workers, because of the difficulties of getting his products through the checkpoints. He manufactured terry cloth towels, once prized throughout the region for their quality, but now his machines are idle.

We met with the president of the Beit Sahour Bus Company, who described the difficulties of doing business under the current conditions and shared his hopes for a better future. He described the obstacles he faces when an engine breaks down since the cost of bringing replacement parts through the checkpoints from Jerusalem or Galilee is prohibitive. His buses used to take tourists between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, but they are no longer allowed to, though Israeli buses and tour guides go freely into Bethlehem carrying visitors he once would have hosted.

At Bethlehem's Deheishei and Aida Refugee Camps we found three generations of Palestinians who have grown up never knowing freedom. Their horizons are limited by the narrow alleyways of these grim warrens where people have waited since 1948 to return to homes that were taken from them when

Israel was established. No peace process can ignore them and the millions of other refugees waiting in similar camps in Gaza, Lebanon, and other countries.

At the Ibdaa Cultural Center in the Deheishei Camp we saw beautiful handmade needlework items for sale. We learned about computer classes and other programs offered there. The people were warm and welcoming despite their struggle to survive. They seem grateful for those who take the time to walk with them in this place, to understand their lives and to take the reality back home.



Aida Refugee Camp



Deheishei Refugee Camp

We attended a presentation from the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem (located in Bethlehem!), which focused on the increasing obstacles to survival for the town of Christ's birth. The Director of the Wiam Center, a supported ministry of the United Methodist Church, hosted us for a brief meeting during which he also described difficulties for Bethlehem residents under occupation. Another supported ministry is Hope School, which we saw in nearby Beit Jalla. One of our group remained after our trip to teach at the school for four months.

We worshipped at the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and talked with parishioners after the service. The challenges faced by each person in the congregation in simply getting to church and putting food on the table cannot be imagined by most Americans. Later in the week we talked with the director of a YMCA counseling program for children who have spent time in Israeli jails.ⁱ

All these experiences gave us a glimpse of the daily reality for Christian and Muslim communities inside Bethlehem and reinforced our sense that Israel is making life extremely difficult for these inhabitants, with the result that many are forced to leave. Christians often have more contacts in the

West who can help them find new opportunities, and this is a major reason the Christian exodus from the West Bank has been greater. But many Christians made it clear to us that they are suffering from the occupation alongside their Muslim neighbors, and that they share their Palestinian identity and goals for freedom. They contradicted reports we often see in the media that Christians are leaving because of persecution from Muslims.

We witnessed first-hand many warm friendships between Christians and Muslims. These are evidence of a religious pluralism and freedom of worship that have existed in Palestine for centuries. We talked with people who remember a time when people of three faith communities lived together in relative peace. A woman in the Deheishei Refugee Camp was named for her mother's Jewish neighbor in 1945, three years before her family fled the fighting in Jerusalem and was never allowed to return. A Jewish man who guided us during part of our visit arranged for his Muslim business partner to join us on another day, and their friendship was evident. It was obvious that this conflict is not about religion, but about the taking of land and water for the use of one ethnic group alone.

3. Increased Restrictions on Movement

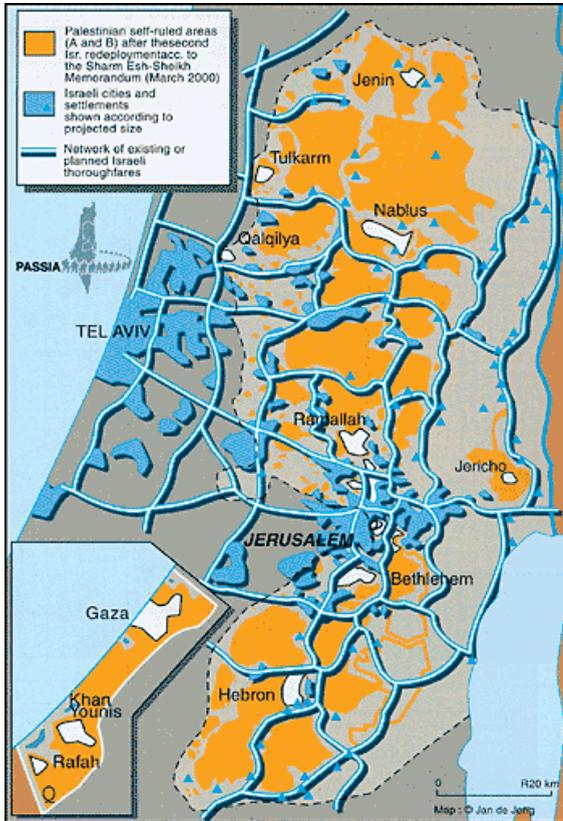
One of the key things our trip helped us understand is how difficult it is for Palestinians to move from one place to another inside the West Bank. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to freedom of movement." Yet, this right is denied to Palestinians by the segregation of roads and the separation wall, as well as checkpoints between Palestinian towns.

The Segregated Roads:

On West Bank roads, Palestinians and Israelis have different colored license plates. Yellow plates indicate Israeli cars, which have access to well-lighted four-lane highways paid for with US tax dollars. Green plates consign Palestinian drivers to bumpy back roads, often necessitating long and round-about routes to reach their destinations. All of these roads are built on Palestinian land that has been occupied by Israel since 1967. They are outside the internationally recognized borders of Israel.

There are laws that govern what a country may do as an occupying power. The Fourth Geneva Convention forbids an occupying power from moving its own people into territory it occupies. Yet Israel has moved half a million of its citizens into the West Bank, taking land and water that belong to the Palestinian people. An occupying country is also forbidden from making physical alterations to the land unless they are made for the benefit of the occupied population. Clearly the segregated roads work to the detriment of Palestinians, who have in many cases lost orchards, grazing lands, and homes as these roads were built, and who see their daily lives disrupted by them.

We experienced these segregated roads first-hand. Going to a farm south of Bethlehem on Sunday afternoon, we arrived at the turnoff to find it blocked for Palestinians. Since our driver was a Palestinian, we had to turn around and go on a winding, bumpy road underneath the highway and up the mountain on the other side. We were never close to Israel, and yet the segregated roadways prevented us from moving directly from one Palestinian village to another. This experience was repeated when we went to visit friends in a northern farming community. The names of many Palestinian villages had been removed from the road signs, and replaced with the names of Israeli settlements.



Network of Israeli-only roads through the West Bank

From the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim, we could see a modern settler road through the West Bank. It connects Jerusalem with the Jordan Valley and literally cuts the West Bank in half. Leaving the settlement, we drove over broken pavement and waited in long lines on the single lane roads available for Palestinians



Modern settler road at Ma'ale Adumim



Palestinian roads in disrepair near Ma'ale Adumim

The Separation Wall:

Another key impediment to movement is the snaking grey wall that winds through Bethlehem and much of the West Bank. Its symbolism of oppression and division is as powerful as its physical presence, which dominates the landscape and separates people from their neighbors, schools and workplaces. It is in many ways a prison wall, trapping people into tiny pockets of economic and social isolation. The concept of a Palestinian “state” formed of these walled and separate pockets is completely untenable. Any “peace proposals” that would leave them in place are not sincere.

As the wall grows, it eats up more and more Palestinian agricultural land. In the northern village of Jayyous, where 95% of the population makes its living from agriculture, the wall takes the form of a fence that cuts the residents off from 70% of their farmland and all of their water wells.ⁱⁱ Now the village must buy expensive water and have it trucked in, though it sits atop the largest aquifer in the West Bank. Very few of the farmers are allowed to go to their crops and orchards, and those are mostly the elderly ones who cannot work the land alone.

It was clear to us as we stood atop the Jayyous municipal building that the barrier has absolutely no security value in this location, since the village is on a hill, and the fence has been built at the bottom of the hill. In the valley, Israelis have built two settlements. No country concerned about its citizens’ safety would move them into a valley below a village where people from whom the land has been stolen are still living. This is made clearer by the fact that there is a large fence already on the ridge four kilometers away which marks Israel’s internationally recognized border or the “Green Line.” That fence is also on a hill and easier to fortify. Clearly the aim of locating settlements here is to seize the most fertile land and the water resources for Israel. Greenhouses into which many farmers have invested their life savings are also cut off from the village by the fence.



Jayyous farmland annexed to Israel by the separation fence

Because of situations like the one above, many people here refer to the wall as the “annexation wall.” We have a graph of the water tables underlying the Jayyous area and the entire West Bank. The route of the wall, weaving in and out and encircling villages, is most intrusive on top of the areas where water is easiest to obtain. It is not hard to conclude that the wall is designed to make life so impossible

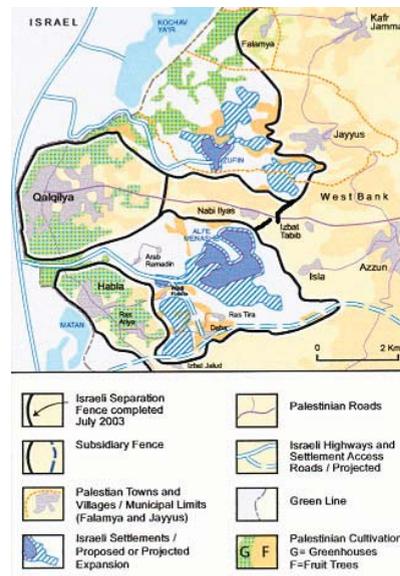
for Palestinians in these areas that they will leave, relinquishing the areas with the greatest water supplies to Israel. It is important to keep water access in mind as Israel “negotiates” with Palestinians over which portions of the land it has seized might be returned.

We also visited friends in Qalqilya, a city completely surrounded by the wall with only one exit, which is tightly controlled by Israeli soldiers. The wall is three stories high and nine miles in circumference. Every road in the town ends at its base. It passes by schools and homes, a constant reminder that no one here is free. Qalqilya was once a thriving agricultural town. One of the men we met with owned a nursery that used to sell plants to Israelis as well as Palestinians. He spoke fondly of the days when Israelis would come and share tea with him while they shopped. Some of his Israeli friends tried to intervene when the bulldozers came to destroy his nursery. Once he employed more than 50 people. Now he cannot provide work for anyone. Almost 70% of the working age population of Qalqilya is unemployed.



United Methodist at the wall in Qalqilya

At right is a map showing the wall around Qalqilya and the Jayyous farmland that has been annexed to Israel. The settlements, which are the stated reason for the wall, are shown in blue. **Israel claims it needs the wall in these areas to protect the settlers, whose presence on this land outside Israel’s borders is illegal under international law.**



We also had a chance to see the impact of the wall on Arab East Jerusalem, as we took a tour of the part of Jerusalem that has been walled out of the city. In an effort to make East Jerusalem more Jewish, Israeli planners have designed the wall to place 55,000 Arab residents of East Jerusalem outside it,ⁱⁱⁱ cutting off their access to schools, jobs, hospitals and trade. At right is a depressed street inside the part of the city that has been arbitrarily sliced off by the wall. We visited the Tomb of Lazarus, which is in this area. Few tourists make the effort to come here now. The poverty and isolation here are essentially hidden from most Christians visiting Jerusalem.



Part of East Jerusalem cut off by the wall

4. The spread of companies profiting from occupation

Israeli soldiers could not conduct their raids on Palestinian villages without weapons supplied by the US government and manufactured by companies in which many of our churches invest. Israeli walls and segregated roads could not separate Palestinian families without products from companies around the world that sell everything from cement to security cameras used in the occupation. Our task during this trip was to document as many items as possible that are used in the occupation and to relate them when we returned to the companies that provide them. We have attached a list of companies that are involved with the wall, the settlements and the military which enforces the occupation. We want to acknowledge the terrific work being done by the Israeli organization Coalition of Women for Peace, which maintains the web site www.whoprofits.org. The leader of our group met with one of their key researchers in Tel Aviv before we went to the West Bank, and she provided helpful lists of companies, maps and information on the industrial zones.

We visited three industrial zones in the West Bank, and saw scores of companies that receive Israeli subsidies and tax incentives to locate there. These companies fall mainly into two categories: (1) those that use hazardous chemicals in the production process, and would thus face high costs for safety and waste disposal inside Israel, and (2) those that were marginally profitable or faced economic losses inside Israel, and need the subsidies and freedom from regulation that the West Bank industrial zones provide.

Just below the Barkan Industrial Zone and the Ariel West Industrial Zone across the street from Barkan, we saw one of the clearest examples of pollution coming from these industries. Brown, fetid water pours from a large culvert onto Palestinian agricultural land. We met with a community leader in the Salfit region, which lies to the south of the Barkan and Ariel West Zones. He described increased rates of cancer and other health problems in Salfit and the nearby villages. The aquifer under this region is in danger of contamination.^{iv} It supplies most of the West Bank's drinking water.



Brown untreated wastewater pours from an industrial zone near Barkan onto Palestinian land

In the Barkan Zone, one of our members entered the lobby of an unmarked building where the smell of chlorine was overwhelming. The chlorine bleaching process produces dioxins, which are known to cause cancer, and it is logical to assume this is among the chemicals polluting the groundwater.

In the Industrial Zones, we documented the presence of the following companies, many of which are currently in the UMC General Board's portfolio: Cemex subsidiary Readymix, Heidelberg Cement subsidiary Hanson, Unilever subsidiary Beigel & Beigel, Assa Abloy subsidiary Mul-T-Lock, Procter & Gamble supplier Avgol, General Mills supplier Shalgal, Volvo, Keter Plastics (which sells its products through Home Depot and will soon sell them through Wal-Mart, Costco, and Sam's Club). We also saw a large building in Mishor Edomim with Mercedes Benz on the side, but were unable to determine if this was owned by that company or was a repair shop for Mercedes vehicles.

At the checkpoints inside the West Bank, we saw Motorola cell phones, Hewlett Packard computers, a modem-like device bearing the Motorola name (similar to the "repeater" device shown below), Ingersoll Rand and Schlage Recognition Systems hand scanners. (See pictures under A below.) On watch towers throughout the West Bank we saw Motorola cameras. (Figure B.) In Jerusalem, we saw abundant evidence of the light rail system Alstom and Veolia Environnement are building to connect the city to illegal settlements in the West Bank. (Figure C.) Our photos also show other examples of companies profiting from the occupation.



A.

Ingersoll Rand/Schlage Hand Scanner, seen in Bethlehem 300 checkpoint



B.

*Motorola "Repeater" "to eliminate dead spots in the workplace"
Similar to a Motorola device seen at Bethlehem 300 checkpoint*



Motorola radio communications device similar to one seen at a checkpoint



B.

Motorola cameras on watch towers in the West Bank



C.

Construction of Light Rail System connecting Jerusalem to the West Bank (Veolia and Alstom are involved.)

Below is more detail on the companies we saw in the Industrial Zones:

We were able to go inside three settlement industrial zones: Barkan, Atarot, and Mishor Edomim. In the Barkan Zone we saw the following companies:



Avgol

Avgol, a major supplier of Procter & Gamble



Soda Club

(Soda Club is carried by BJ's wholesale outlets and by Williams Sonoma in the US. BJ's is a public company traded on the NYSE as BJ. Williams Sonoma is a public company traded on NYSE as WSM.)



the Beigel & Beigel subsidiary of Unilever

(Unilever has said it will move its Beigel and Beigel subsidiary out of the West Bank but in a 2009 letter to the NEUMC divestment task force, the company chairman refused to provide a timetable for this move. Meanwhile, Unilever continues to profit from its location in the Barkan Industrial Zone.)



The Mul-T-Lok subsidiary of Assa Abloy

Assa Abloy committed to move its Mul-T-Lok plant out of Barkan in 2008.^v However, it was still in Barkan in 2010 and the Treasurer of Assa Abloy told the New England United Methodist Divestment Task Force that it would be at least 2011 before work would be completed on a new facility inside Israel. Meanwhile, the company continues to profit from its location in the Barkan Zone.)

Near the Barkan Zone we stopped at a small super market attached to a gas station. It is apparently where many of the settlers from the nearby settlements of Ariel and Barkan shop. We found a number of US-made products on the shelves, including Kellogg, Nestle, and Colgate, and the vest jackets that the employees wore had Unilever in large letters across the backs, along with some other company names in smaller letters scattered about. It appears they may be provided primarily by Unilever for advertising. Companies selling products there are also helping sustain the illegal settlements.

We took a tour of Keter Plastics in the Barkan Zone, which sells its storage containers through Home Depot. The person who gave us the tour said the company would soon be selling through Sam's Club, Walmart and Costco, as well. Keter is privately owned, and is a subsidiary of Lipski

Plastics, which also has a plant in Barkan. Home Depot is publicly owned (NYSE:HD) and should be approached about carrying these products, as should Wal-Mart (NYSE:WMT) and Costco (NASDAQ:COST). United Methodists can do this as individuals in their own home towns.



Keter Plastics, Atarot

In Atarot, and also in Mishor Edomim, we saw Readymix cement factories owned by Cemex. Cemex is in the United Methodist GBPHB Portfolio. In addition to having plants in three settlements (Mevo Khoron, Mishor Edomim, and Atarot) Cemex provides much of the material for the structures of occupation in the West Bank. Cemex also has a quarry on occupied land in the West Bank. We visited that on another day.

Inside the Keter plant we saw equipment made by Krauss Maffei. Krauss-Maffei UK distributes and services injection molding, extrusion, and polyurethane foam molding equipment used to process plastics. Krauss-Maffei UK is the UK-based subsidiary of Krauss-Maffei Kunststofftechnik, which was the plastics processing division of Germany-based Krauss-Maffei AG until 1986. Krauss Maffei appears to be privately held



Readymix, owned by Cemex



Heidelberg Cement subsidiary Hanson, Atarot

We also saw the Hanson subsidiary of Heidelberg Cement, which is in the United Methodist GBPHB Portfolio. The company manufactures ready-made cement, aggregates and asphalt used in Israel's construction of illegal settlements and other physical structures of the occupation. It owns concrete plants in the illegal settlements of Modi'in Illit and Atarot, an asphalt plant and an aggregates quarry south of Elqana, also in the West Bank. Through the quarry, it exploits natural resources belonging to Palestinians for the company's financial gain.

The Atarot Industrial Zone is home to Shalgal, a company which produces dough for General Mills. By using this dough in its products, General Mills is also supporting the Israeli occupation.

In Mishor Edomim we saw a very large garage and repair shop owned by Mayers Cars and Trucks, the Volvo distributor in Israel. The building had “Volvo” written in large letters on all four sides. We also saw a building with Mercedes written in large letters. We were unsure if this was a repair center or an actual facility owned by Mercedes.



Volvo Repair center owned by Volvo distributor

5. Expanding Settlements:



In defiance of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits an occupying power from moving its own population into areas it occupies, Israel has moved about 500,000 illegal settlers into the Palestinian West Bank. Most of these settlements are built on land confiscated from Palestinians. For the last three years, the number of settlers in the West Bank has been growing at three times the rate of Israel's population within its legal borders. Despite a "construction freeze" that is supposed to be in place to facilitate peace talks with Palestinians, we saw ample evidence that this construction is ongoing.



Construction crane at work in the settlement of Gilo, near Bethlehem, February 2010

We saw many settlements during our drives through the West Bank. We had a chance to go into the largest of them, Ma'ele Adumim, which is east of Jerusalem, deep inside the occupied territory. It is in a way the most alarming, since it is adjacent to the Israeli-occupied Jordan Valley, and planned development of a corridor between Jerusalem and Ma'ele Adumim will literally cut the West Bank in half. The new city limits of Jerusalem extend eastward to bring the 30,000 Jewish inhabitants of Maele Adumim into the city limits, while cutting 55,000 Arab residents out.^{vi}

We visited the colony with a Jewish Israeli guide who told us a great deal about the planned corridor, and pointed out the new police station in the distance that is to be the centerpiece of the development. Roads have already been completed through the area....segregated roads, for Israelis only, built on Palestinian land. There are hundreds of kilometers of these settler roadways throughout the West Bank, but this one will make it possible for Israelis to zip through the West Bank to the Jordan Valley and all the way to the Jordan River without ever seeing a Palestinian or evidence of the people they have displaced.

We also saw Jewish settler homes in the Christian quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. The Old City is divided into Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Armenian quarters. Settlers have occupied buildings in the Christian quarter, hanging Israeli flags from the balconies along with laundry and other reminders of their presence.

An Israeli flag hangs from a building in the Christian Quarter of the Old City.



In the Arab neighborhood known as Silwan just outside the Old City walls, demolition orders have been issued for 22 homes. Jewish settlers are already taking over buildings and establishing a visible presence there. In 2009, eviction notices were issued for 90 Palestinian families living in the neighborhood. If all their homes are demolished, 1,500 people will be left homeless.^{vii} Israel alleges they have built or added onto their homes without permits. Yet it is virtually impossible to obtain a permit for Palestinians to expand dwellings they own.

One of the most disturbing settlements we saw was in the Arab part of East Jerusalem known as Sheik Jarrah. There, settlers have taken over homes and evicted their Palestinian inhabitants, who were given these homes by the United Nations when they became refugees in 1948. This is part of a process which some Israelis openly call the “Judaization” of Jerusalem. It is an attempt to change the demography of the city by removing Palestinians and replacing them with Jews.^{viii}



Palestinian home confiscated by Jewish settlers in Sheik Jarrah, East Jerusalem

According to Dr. Alice Rothchild, “when Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1967 the state declared only 12 percent of the land zoned for Palestinian residential purposes, and that land was already developed, while 34 percent was zoned for future Jewish settlements. Thus, for the 240,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, there is a serious housing shortage and prices are high.”^{ix}

Just south of Bethlehem we saw a ring of settlements on hilltops surrounding a Christian family’s farm. These settlements are clearly built on Palestinian land inside the West Bank. Settlers have already come to the farm and cut down hundreds of olive trees and burst the family’s water tower. Shortly after our visit, Israeli soldiers served notice to the family that many of the structures on their property, including their water cistern, would be destroyed. The family is appealing this order to the Supreme Court. If their property is seized, the last Christian presence in that area will be eliminated, and the ring of settlements that cut Bethlehem off from the southern West Bank will be complete.



Settlements surrounding Christian farm



Christian landowners Daoud and Jihan Nassar

Finally, we saw Jewish settlements inside the southern West Bank town of Hebron, which has about 500 Jewish settlers amid about 130,000 Palestinians. A former Israeli soldier who helped found a group called “Breaking the Silence” was our guide. He had served with the army in Hebron.



Settlement with watchtower in Hebron

We visited the gravesite and memorial park erected to honor another settler named Baruch Goldstein, who massacred 29 Muslim worshippers at prayer in the Ibrahimi Mosque in 1994.^x Since the massacre, the main commercial streets inside the town of Hebron have been shuttered by an Israeli order, and many Palestinian homes have been taken over by Israeli settlers. The crime was committed by an Israeli, but Palestinians are paying the price. There was graffiti in Hebrew on many of the buildings and the Star of David was painted on the doors of former Palestinian shops. Whole streets looked like ghost towns with shattered windows and caged balconies constructed to prevent settlers from throwing stones at the Palestinians who lived there. There are newer buildings with Israeli flags, and signs on some of the buildings saying “Hebron belongs to Jews”, stating that Palestinians had taken over Jewish homes after a 1929 massacre in which 67 Jewish residents were killed and others fled. Our Israeli guide told us a rumor had reached the town that Arabs had been killed and the Al Aqsa Mosque (one of the holiest sites for Islam) had been damaged by Jews, and this prompted the rampage, although hundreds of Jews were sheltered by Arab families.^{xi} This town has seen a century of heartache, but at one time Jews and Palestinians lived here in peace.



Closed Palestinian shops in Hebron



Star of David on a closed Palestinian shop



Door with “Death to Arabs” in Hebrew

As we reviewed what we had learned about the settlements, we were particularly disturbed by the environmental disaster they represent. Many are located on hilltops, and although the Israeli government connects them to water and electricity, sewers are often the last utilities to be added. Sewage and, as we mentioned earlier in the report, industrial waste, flows from many of these settlements down onto the Palestinian farmland and aquifers below.^{xii} Settlements in the Jordan Valley divert large quantities of water from the Jordan River and it has shriveled to a dirty creek in many parts. The impact of this water diversion on the Dead Sea, which lies at the lower end of the Jordan River, has been devastating. Resorts once built at seaside are now far from the water.^{xiii} Syria and Jordan also divert water from the Dead Sea.

We passed many areas where Palestinian fruit and olive trees had been cut down by Israeli soldiers and settlers. We learned that olive trees can live for hundreds, even thousands of years, but that they take many decades to bear fruit. Grandfathers plant them for their grandchildren to harvest. In addition to providing the income for a large portion of the Palestinian population, they are an important part of the ecosystem in the region. They provide shade for growing other plants during the hot, arid summers.

According to one expert, “The olive is vital to the Palestinian economy, with the fruit being sold to eat, to be turned into olive oil, or to be turned into soap. Furthermore, when olives have been pressed for their oil, the stones inside are crushed, and can then be mulched for fertilizer, or dried into briquettes to be used as a source of heat.”^{xiv} This renewable resource is being destroyed, as hundreds of thousands of trees have been cut or uprooted.^{xv}

In one bright spot, we learned about a program launched by the Joint Advocacy Initiative of the East Jerusalem YMCA, which aimed to plant 50,000 olive trees in the West Bank to replace some of those that have been taken.^{xvi} It has already planted over 62,000 trees. Some Methodist churches have sold olivewood Christmas ornaments made by a Palestinian carpenter to raise money for the planting of new trees, and we were able to walk by some of these trees on a farm we visited.

Conclusion:

Those on our trip who had visited the Holy Land before found a much deeper and more pervasive occupation than we had witnessed earlier. Though we had not thought it possible for things to get worse, they have. The concept of “negotiations” between two parties with such an imbalance of power seems almost incomprehensible. Only the immediate and urgent application of international law to the situation holds any hope for change.

The occupation violates international law. It must end. Israel’s ongoing attacks against the Palestinian people and the occasional projectiles fired in response from the Gaza Strip must stop. The portions of the separation wall built inside the West Bank are illegal and must be dismantled. The settlements outside Israel’s internationally recognized borders are illegal and must be withdrawn. The demolition of homes and the confiscation of land by the Israeli military are illegal and must end. Rightful ownership must be restored. When these conditions are met, and only then, will there be any prospect of peace. Israel holds the key to these conditions for ending the conflict.

The United Methodist Church has a number of investments in companies that profit from Israel’s violations of international law. They are detailed on the following pages. Other US denominations are also involved through their investments. Having seen the deepening occupation and the extent of

corporate involvement in sustaining it, we urgently recommend divestment from the companies that allow it to continue.

In closing, we would like to share two quotes: First, from the Kairos Document issued by Palestinian Christians in 2009: "Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: Are you willing and able to work with us to restore our freedom? Our freedom will be the only sustainable foundation for both Palestinians and Israelis to live in love, justice, peace and security."

Second, from Rabbi Brant Rosen: "When will we find the wherewithal to say out loud that this policy of home demolitions, checkpoints, evictions, increased Jewish settlements, and land expropriations is inhumane and indefensible? At the very least, will we be ready to put our money where our moral conscience is?" Returning home, we ask the same questions of the United Methodist Church.

End notes:

During our trip, we spent time with a number of Jewish Israelis who support divestment. Our denomination received letters of encouragement from many Jewish groups and individuals prior to the 2008 General Conference. www.unitedmethodistdivestment.com A recent initiative by the student body at the University of California Berkeley campus also received many Jewish letters of support, including some very eloquent statements from US rabbis. These are available at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/30663779/Growing-Jewish-Support-for-UC-Berkeley-Divestment-from-Israeli-Occupation-4-28-10> .

We especially recommend the letter by Rabbi Rosen, which addresses several concerns we often hear from United Methodists about divestment. Three important paragraphs are included below. They were written about the student resolution in California, but could just as easily refer to the approach being discussed in many United Methodist conferences, which is *selective* divestment from only those companies which help sustain the occupation.

Quote from Rabbi Rosen:

“...It is also unfair and untrue to say that this resolution is “anti-Israel.” The bill makes it clear that it is condemning a crushing and illegal occupation – and not Israel as a nation. The wording of the resolution leaves no doubt that its purpose is to divest from specific companies that aid and abet the occupation – and not to “demonize” Israel itself. If a group of students oppose the occupation as unjust, then why should we be threatened if they ask their own organization to divest funds that directly support it? This is not demonization – this is simply ethically responsible investment policy.

Why, many critics ask, are the Berkeley students singling out Israel when there are so many other worse human rights abusers around the world? To answer this, I think we need to look at the origins of the BDS movement itself. This campaign was not hatched by the Berkeley students, or even by international human rights activists. It was founded in 2005 by a wide coalition of groups from Palestinian civil society who sought to resist the occupation through nonviolent direct action.

In other words, BDS is a liberation campaign waged by the Palestinian people themselves – one for which they are seeking international support. By submitting this divestment resolution, the Berkeley students were not seeking to single out Israel as the world’s worst human rights offender – they are responding to a call from Palestinians to support their struggle against very real oppression....” (*emphasis added*)

ⁱ According to the Israeli Human Rights Group B'tselem, there were 23 children under 16 in Israeli custody, and 264 children between the ages of 16 and 18. Last February, 2009, there were 54 children under 16 in Israeli custody and 346 between the ages of 16 and 18.

ⁱⁱ http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Minors_in_Custody.asp
<http://www.jayyousonline.org/english.HTM>, <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/28770>

ⁱⁱⁱ www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/598249.html, Alon, Gideon, “55,000 J'lem Arabs to remain outside fence,” Ha'aretz, July 11, 2005

^{iv} http://imeu.net/news/article0019437.shtml?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+imeu+%28IMEU+%3A+Institute+for+Middle+East+Understanding%29

^v http://www.americantaskforce.org/daily_news_article/2009/02/25/1235593121_2

^{vi} <http://www.forbes.com/feeds/ap/2008/10/21/ap5584231.html>, Associated Press, “Lockmaker Assa Abloy to Move West Bank Plant,” October 20, 2008

^{vii} http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2005/07/11/israel_set_on_jerusalem_wall/

^{viii} Plushnick-Masti Ramit, Associated Press, “Israel Set on Jerusalem Wall Plan,” Boston Globe, July 11, 2005.

^{ix} http://www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/view.php?recordID=2588

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- ^{viii} This process is also taking place in the Galilee region of Israel, which our group visited. Segregated neighborhoods such as Nazareth Illit, overlooking the Arab village of Nazareth, are part of an organized effort to change the demography of the Galilee to be more Jewish.
- ^{ix} <http://www.alicerothchild.com/saltlaketribune.pdf> Rothchild, Alice, "The Judaization of East Jerusalem," The Salt Lake Tribune, November 27, 2007.
- ^x http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baruch_Goldstein, <http://search.intelius.com/Baruch-Goldstein>
- ^{xi} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1929_Hebron_massacre,
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/hebron29.html>, Schoenberg, Shira, "The Hebron Massacre of 1929."
- ^{xii} http://www.btselem.org/Download/200906_Foul_Play_eng.pdf
- ^{xiii} <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/11/28/eveningnews/main2213458.shtml>
- ^{xiv} http://www.imemc.org/index.php?obj_id=53&story_id=57946
- ^{xv} Parrhesia, Circare, "250 Olive Trees Planted By Volunteers Near Osh Grab," IMEMC News, February 12, 2010.
http://www.poica.org/editor/case_studies/view.php?recordID=903
- ^{xvi} <http://www.jai-pal.org/content.php?page=1>