

A Call to Boycott SodaStream

The General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church reaffirms its commitment to human rights, peace, and international law with a boycott against SodaStream as long as the company maintains production facilities in the illegally occupied West Bank.

This action is proposed in compliance with “Guidelines for Instituting an Economic Boycott” as prescribed in the *2012 Book of Resolutions*, pages 522-7.

Rationale

Isaiah warns, “Doom to those who acquire house after house, who annex field to field until there is no more space left and only you live alone in the land” (Isaiah 5:8). In Matthew, Jesus preaches on the importance of loving neighbor saying, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:40).

As United Methodists, our Social Principles call us to love our neighbors – and indeed all human beings – in many ways, among them by standing up for human rights and peace. In Our Social Creed, “we commit ourselves to the rights of [all people]; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons (§166).” Our *Social Principles* call us to “seek justice, and serve as reconcilers of conflict (§165).” And, we recognize the importance of international law and United Nations “as the best instruments now in existence to achieve a world of justice and law (§165).”

We have turned that commitment to rights, peace, and law into resolution on this issue specifically. In the *2012 Book of Resolutions*, we reaffirmed our “Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land (Res. #6111)” and asked “all companies that profit from and/or support settlements through their business activities to examine these and stop any business that contributes to serious violations of international law, promotes systemic discrimination or otherwise supports ongoing military occupation (p. 813).” Several groups within the church have already taken action against companies that play a role or profit from the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

We now call for a boycott against SodaStream products in keeping with those values and commitments.

At Issue

SodaStream is a company that produces counter-top kitchen appliances that turn tap water into carbonated water, allowing people to make their own soda and other fizzy beverages. SodaStream promotes its products as environmentally conscious alternatives to traditional bottled beverages. In recent years, their market share and name recognition has grown. However, SodaStream decided to build their main factory in Mishor Adumim, an industrial zone in the illegal Israeli settlement of Maale Adumim, in the illegally occupied West Bank.

The company’s decision to place their factory in occupied Palestinian territory contributes to the occupation and growing inequality between Israelis and Palestinians. Supporting SodaStream is counter to the Social Principles the United Methodist Church. Resolution #6111, cited here, expressly states that “The United Methodist Church does not support a boycott of products made in Israel. Our opposition is to products made by Israeli companies operating in occupied Palestinian territories” (p. 813).

SodaStream has used the location of its factory to skirt the just fair labor practices required by law. The Israeli Supreme Court has ruled that Palestinians working in occupied Palestinian territory are entitled to the same labor protections as Israelis. However, in a rare and risky move, a Palestinian employee of SodaStream reports those rights are routinely violated. Workers are expected to work regular 12 hour shifts and 60 hour weeks, a clear violation of Israeli labor law which limits the work day to 8 hours and the work week to 45 hours. Additionally, night shifts and overtime are paid at the standard rate, without the legally required bonus pay.

Despite these clear violations of the law, employees have no recourse to justice. Workers are initially disempowered by the high unemployment rate in occupied Palestine (upwards of 30% by many estimates). As a result, many Palestinians have no choice but to seek employment in the very settlements that fund the occupation of their land. However, in order to work in the settlements, Palestinians must apply for work permits, which require clearance by Israeli General Security Service (Shabak). If Palestinian workers demand their rights, they lose their work permit and thus their jobs because Shabak's broad definition of 'security risks' include persons involved in labor disagreements with employers.

Second, the SodaStream factory re-enforces and supports the settlements, settlements we as United Methodists have condemned. The *2012 Book of Resolutions* we profess our belief that the building of settlements "subverts the peace process, destroys the hope of both Israelis and Palestinians who are working for and longing for peace, and fosters a sense of desperation that can only lead to further violence... (811)." The factory in Mishor Adumim supports the settlement of Maale Adumim in two ways: 1) it provides permanent infrastructure and jobs to the largest settlement (by area) in occupied Palestine and 2) taxes paid by the factory go to support the Israeli government and the Maale Adumim settlement, not the Palestinians – contributing to the inequality gap between the two peoples.

Not only does the factory's location in Mishor Adumim support settlements that are illegal under international law and counter-productive to the peace process, but it – and other industry like it – allow Israel to profit from the occupation, which is illegal.

Finally, SodaStream has perpetrated a fraud against its customers. SodaStream has repeatedly labeled their products as 'Made in Israel,' this includes the machine which company records indicate can be built only in the Mishor Adumim factory, outside of the internationally recognized borders of Israel. In response to critics, SodaStream suggests that they operate the factory in occupied Palestinian territory at an additional cost to them, in an effort to build "bridges" between Palestinian and Israelis. In one video, SodaStream CEO Daniel Birnbaum claims "we're not getting government incentives to be here [in Mishor Adumim]; we pay a penalty to be here." However, in the report required prior to registering with NASDAQ, SodaStream claimed if it moved the factory to the Israeli side of the Green Line it would lose tax deductions and other incentives it receives from the Israeli government for operating in the occupied West Bank. And, in an interview in March 2000, founder Peter Wiseburgh admitted that the location initially was chosen because of deep economic incentives from the Israeli government.

When contacted regarding these serious accusations, SodaStream simply rejects the validity of the claims made against them. SodaStream claims that their labor practices are fair and overseen by the Israeli Office for Environmental Protection, but it does not seem that any Palestinian agency is given the opportunity to run their own audit on working conditions or evaluate the labor practices. SodaStream claims the

settlement in which they operate is not illegal because the law, as it was intended to function, does not apply to the situation in Israel, opinions issued by numerous international law scholars and jurists and reports made by human rights organizations reject this interpretation of the law: the overwhelming majority of legal opinion holds that the settlements are a clear violation of international law. Finally, the company argues that customers do not seem to care where their products are made, implying that because many customers do not care, no fraud has been perpetrated against them, rejecting basic consumer rights norms. These responses are not satisfactory.

Despite appeals from representatives of the General Board of Church and Society, the Obama administration is unwilling to stop imports of settlement products.

Decision Making

The decision to boycott is a serious one. Boycotts can have significant manipulative power. After thoughtful and prayerful consideration, we believe that a boycott of SodaStream products (until they cease production in the occupied West Bank) is justified and will serve to further the peace process between these peoples in conflict. We will join a growing movement – one that already includes other levels of our church – that recognizes that our consumer choices can play an important role in the process of peace for Israel and Palestine. A successful boycott of SodaStream not only has the power to change that company’s business practices, but sends an important message to other companies profiting from the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The fewer people, companies, and other organizations who profit from the occupation, the closer we come to a just peace.

Resources and Monitoring

Upon approval, the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) will disperse information through its established networks. SodaStream will be informed of the boycott and its purpose. And, GBCS will take responsibility all other communication, coordination, and monitoring related to the boycott.

Suspension/Termination

The boycott will terminate once SodaStream removes all facilities from occupied Palestinian territory and ends all activities that contribute to the perpetuation of the occupation.