

UCC boycotts to press Israel over occupied Palestine

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A [resolution](#) for selective boycott and divestment from corporations benefiting from Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory was unanimously recommended by a committee of delegates and overwhelmingly affirmed (508-124) by delegates to the United Church of Christ's General Synod at their meeting last week in Cleveland,. In the face of decades of failed negotiations and Israeli government intransigence, we are acknowledging that Israel will have to be pressed by people of conscience around the world, including American churches, if there is to be freedom and equality for Palestinians in our lifetimes.

The call for action was included in a resolution sponsored by 10 of the United Church of Christ's regional conferences, an unprecedented alliance, and supported by the church's nationwide Palestine Israeli Network. The lead sponsor of the resolution was the UCC's Central Atlantic Conference based in Catonsville. The action built upon a 2005 resolution calling for the use of economic leverage to end Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories and is consistent with United Church of Christ resolutions since 1967 that call for lasting peace, an end to the occupation and a nonviolent resolution to the conflict.

From my many trips to the region, I have concluded that what is taking place on the ground today is an ever-more assertive and sophisticated occupation.

Among the many endorsers of the resolution was South African Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who wrote to the delegates, "We grieve over Israel's decades long oppression of Palestine and Palestinians: The illegal occupation; the expanding West Bank settlements; the separation wall; the siege of Gaza; the manipulation of water rights; the network of checkpoints and settler bypass roads; the detention of people without charges; the travel restrictions; identity cards, and disruption of every aspect of daily life for Palestinians. ... It is unconscionable to remain silent."

Rather than remain silent and complicit by accepting investment and/or pension income from corporations facilitating Israel's occupation, the Synod delegates voted overwhelmingly to divest from a select list of companies including Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, Motorola Solutions, Veolia and G4S. A second list of corporations producing items or using facilities in illegal settlements was also identified, including Ahava, SodaStream and Hadiklaim.

In affirming this resolution for selective boycott, the United Church of Christ joins a growing international chorus and continues the church's long history of engagement in the region, which dates back to the early 19th century. Other aspects of the resolution call for study of the Kairos Palestine document, compliance with U.S. laws regarding foreign and military assistance, and continued interfaith dialogue.

Some will argue that this resolution is offensive to Jews and will damage the church's relationship with Jewish neighbors here in the U.S., relationships that many of us have nurtured for many years. Jewish voices supporting boycotts and sanctions have been growing in number, and several, including Jewish Voice for Peace, were present as supportive observers at the synod.

This resolution is not about the relationship of Christians and Jews, as important as that is. It is about the brutal conditions that Palestinians have endured for nearly 50 years and about the ongoing threat to peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians alike. We are talking about a political conflict between Israel and an occupied Palestinian population that cries out for nonviolent resolution by all parties. This is not about a potential conflict between some American Christians and some American Jews.

“In approving this resolution, the UCC has demonstrated its commitment to justice and equality,” said the Rev. Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian and pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

“For Palestinians living under occupation or facing systematic discrimination as citizens of Israel, enduring the destruction of their homes and businesses, the theft of their land for settlements, and living under blockade and siege in Gaza, this action sends a strong signal that they are not alone, and that there are churches who still dare to speak truth to power and stand with the oppressed,” Raheb, who addressed the synod in Cleveland, added.

This synod’s resolution is a clear call, an unequivocal moral statement, that we do not accept the occupation, we will not support the occupation and we will not financially participate in it or benefit financially from it. We long for the day when Palestinians and Israelis both live in peace and security. With this action, the UCC has rightly recognized such a day is not possible without pressure on the Israeli government and complicit corporations to pull back from profiting at the expense of Palestinians living under occupation.