

UCC Action Seeking Peace Between Israel and Palestine

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By Rev. Dr. John C.
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Delegates representing the United Church of Christ gathered in Cleveland last week, and among the many things they did over their week together was to debate a resolution regarding the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. The resolution called for the United Church of Christ, in all of its settings, to divest from companies that profit from the occupation of Palestinian territories and boycott products made by companies that operate in illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The United Church of Christ comes together not just to speak words and pass resolutions. We listen for the voice of our still-speaking God, made manifest in the collective and prayerful discernment of the men and women gathered to speak to our churches and in our world. We do not speak with an assumption that our voice is the only voice in the vast marketplace of ideas that try to capture the hearts and minds of others, but we do speak with passion, conviction, clarity.

Ten years ago in Atlanta General Synod took significant action by calling for the use of economic leverage, including boycotts, divestment and sanctions to address the continuing Occupation. This year's resolution is built upon the foundation of that 2005 resolution.

Today, the situation is worse than it was ten years ago. The UN report on last summer's Gaza war gives evidence to this. Among the current matters that compel this action are the following:

What we find on the ground today is an ever more assertive and sophisticated occupation;

In the recent Israeli election, in a moment of candor, the Prime Minister disavowed any hope of a "two state" solution in his campaign rhetoric;

Beyond rhetoric, the red-tiled roofs of ever expanding Israeli settlements make the possibility of Palestinian statehood less and less likely.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa knows something about the intentional denigration, separation and subjugation of a people. We are honored that Archbishop Tutu has endorsed this resolution. In addition to his endorsement come other supportive endorsements from dozens of organizations and individuals across a broad spectrum. The Archbishop writes:

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.

We condemn the brutality of Israel's policies. But we do not condemn Judaism or Jews.

The United Church of Christ, deeply aware of the atrocities and injustices perpetrated by both Israel and Palestine, nonetheless sees the human rights violations under which the people of Palestine must live daily as an injustice that calls for our attention, demands our voice, and requires our action.

Many progressive Jews in the United States and in Israel recognize the injustice of occupation. On this matter, in the hope for peace for Israelis and Palestinians, and on many social justice issues over the past several decades, we stand together. Where we may not agree with some is in the means by which we believe peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians can be achieved. The particular call for boycotts, divestment, and or sanctions of Israel is not only one with which even some of our progressive allies in the Jewish world disagree, it is one that is sometimes

interpreted by them as an existential threat to Israeli statehood. It is also not what the UCC endorsed; our call focuses on occupation.

We will continue to engage with Jewish brothers and sisters in interfaith dialogue, and while we affirm Israel's right to exist within secure and internationally recognized boundaries, nonetheless we persist in our belief that this resolution's advocacy of non-violent means - both economic and political - will hasten the day when the world can join Israelis and Palestinians in celebrating a just peace and a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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Award recipient for peace commitments