

## **BDS Scorecard: Methodists recommend sanctions & boycotts; reject divestment**

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May 3: Afternoon session of United Methodist Church General Conference.

The U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation was honored to witness and support a historic vote by the world United Methodist Church (UMC)'s 2012 General Conference (GC), the highest decision-making body of the church, to adopt a resolution:

1. Urging the U.S. government to "end all military aid to the region";
2. Calling on "all nations to prohibit... any financial support by individuals or organizations for the construction and maintenance of settlements"; and
3. Calling on "all nations to prohibit... the import of products made by companies in Israeli settlements on Palestinian land."

May 2: Afternoon session of United Methodist Church General Conference.

At the same time, the U.S. Campaign regrets that the GC subsequently voted against a resolution to divest from Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, and Hewlett Packard (HP) due to the corporations' complicity in the Israeli occupation. For more than forty years, the UMC has passed countless resolutions condemning the Israeli occupation and affirming the rights of the Palestinian people to freedom and self-determination. The divestment campaign, led by United Methodist Kairos Response (UMKR), a US Campaign coalition member, sought to align UMC policy with UMC pension fund investments in response to the Kairos Palestine document, a call from Palestinian Christians to move from sympathetic words to tangible action.

The votes followed multiple impassioned speeches on the GC plenary floor, witnessed by 1,000 voting delegates; hundreds of supporters, bishops, and church leaders; and thousands around the world online. Diverse delegates, young and old, who had traveled from as far as South Africa, the Philippines, and Jerusalem, spoke eloquently in favor of the resolutions. [The deliberations can be viewed here (starting at minute 17:58) and continuing here.] The US Campaign was proud to be there in support of them.

The passing resolution, entitled "Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land," [view original and amendments] urges United Methodists to read Kairos Palestine, a document that calls for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) as tools of love and solidarity to support Palestinian liberation. The document in essence endorses the U.S. Campaign's flagship End U.S. Military Aid to Israel Campaign, along with numerous member group-led campaigns challenging military aid and the costs of occupation.

The resolution specifically commends "the 2010 British Methodist Church's call 'on the Methodist people to support and engage with [a] boycott of Israeli goods emanating from illegal settlements,' as well as a call for nonviolent actions issued by several Annual Conferences."

The New York, Northern Illinois, and West Ohio UMC Annual Conferences have already divested from companies involved in the Israeli occupation, and the California - Nevada Conference has voted to do so as well.

The resolution states: "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." It bears reminding that the vast majority of Israeli companies, even those with products made in Israel, operate in some way in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, so the distinction is largely a false one. Nonetheless, many BDS campaigns in the United States and around the world do target specifically settlement-produced goods, including the "Stolen Beauty Campaign" spearheaded by U.S. Campaign member group CodePink targeting Ahava beauty products made in the Israeli settlement Mitzpe Shalem. The new Methodist resolution implicitly endorses this among many other BDS campaigns.

The resolution urges United Methodists to "develop recommendations to ensure that tax-exempt funds do not support illegal settlements and other violations of international law," citing the ongoing settlement funding by tax-exempt organizations today. A list of such organizations would include the Jewish National Fund (funding Jewish-only colonies while actively displacing and dispossessing Palestinians since before 1948), currently targeted by the international "Stop the JNF Campaign" led in part by the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, a new member of the U.S. Campaign coalition.

The resolution also affirms the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands, and it encourages United Methodists to work with solidarity organizations on the ground such as Christian Peacemaker Teams, a U.S. Campaign member group.

The original divestment resolution was gutted in the GC Finance and Administration Committee, which sanctioned two amendments. The first replaced clear, binding language calling for active divestment with consideration of advocating that companies sign the "Ruggie Principles," which assert the responsibility of business enterprises to "avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts" and to "seek to prevent or mitigate" any such impacts linked to their business operations or relationships, but provides no enforcement of the principles. The amendment, rather than complementing divestment, cynically sought to replace it, evading the UMC's responsibility to end its own contributions to "adverse human rights impacts."

The second amendment by anti-divestment delegates advocated investment in the Palestinian economy to help ease the suffering of Palestinians. This silencing of widespread Palestinian demands for divestment, masquerading as support for Palestinians, was challenged repeatedly by Palestinian guest speakers who insisted emphatically that charity is not a substitute for freedom and justice.

The amended resolution, which is also non-binding and open-ended, passed. Despite flowery messaging in support of peace, the UMC refused to end its investments in corporations profiting from Israel's brutal and illegal military occupation, and thus remains deeply implicated. The US Campaign joins UMKR and others in asserting that actions speak louder than words.

Broad media coverage of and grassroots contributions to UMKR's divestment campaign, however, have caught the attention of the world and amplified criticism of the Israeli occupation and complicit U.S. corporations -- such as Caterpillar, Motorola, and HP -- to new levels that cannot be ignored. There is more work ahead to hold these companies (among others) fully accountable for their abuses. The Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace and Justice, the University of California at Berkeley Students for Justice in Palestine, Jewish Voice for Peace, Adalah-NY, Global Exchange, and the American Friends Service Committee, are among the many U.S. Campaign coalition members actively targeting the companies in grassroots BDS campaigns, many of them through the nationwide "We Divest Campaign" calling on financial giant TIAA-CREF to divest from corporations profiting from the Israeli occupation.

BDS has entered the very highest levels of mainstream U.S. institutions. The Presbyterian Church (USA) also will be debating resolutions this summer at its General Assembly on boycott of Ahava settlement products and divestment from Caterpillar, Motorola, and HP. Presbyteries around the country have already passed local overtures calling for boycotts and divestment.

Thousands of allies around the world, both individuals and organizations, joined together in support of UMKR on their grassroots Methodist-led campaign. Hundreds of volunteers from dozens of U.S. Campaign member groups contributed in creative and diverse ways, large and small, joined by allies from Serbia to Puerto Rico; South Africa to the Philippines; London to Tel Aviv; and beyond. This truly grassroots, unifying, Methodist-led initiative reminds us of the noble legacy of faith-based organizations leading the way on social justice struggles, one victory at a time.

The highest voting body of the United Methodist Church, which is the largest mainline Protestant denomination in the United States, has recommended boycotts and sanctions -- as well as an end to individual and organizational financial support for settlements -- as tools for ending Israel's brutal occupation and discriminatory policies. The U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation congratulates United Methodist Kairos Response and the thousands of other Methodists and people of conscience who joined together to support this historic move.