

General News and Announcements

United Church of Canada Policies on Israel and Palestine

September 11, 2012

The following is an overview of the policies of The United Church of Canada in relation to Israel and Palestine, reflecting the decisions made at the 41st General Council and referencing the policy base that was unchanged by the decisions of the Council. For the full report of the Working Group on Israel and Palestine Policy, and the text of the motion approved by the 41st General Council, visit the [UNJPPI] website.

The report of the working group originated with the 40th General Council (2009) which, like a number of Councils before it, had received numerous proposals from around the church calling for specific actions in relation to Israel and Palestine. Because of the number of these proposals and, in some cases, content that concerned the Council, the direction was given to report back to the 41st General Council with a comprehensive statement on United Church policy. This report was prepared by a small working group from the Executive who had not been associated with previous proposals to General Council on this topic.

The 41st General Council (2012) upheld the United Church's long commitment to deepening relationships and supporting the voices of Palestinian Christians, coupled with a deep concern for the welfare and security of Israel. The Council affirmed continuing support for a two-state solution to resolve the turmoil in the region and as an option of offering security and justice for all of its peoples. The Council named the occupation, begun in 1967, as a major contributor to the injustice that underlies the violence of the region. It also denounced

- the ongoing aggression and incitement to violence toward the state of Israel and its people
- all questions of Israel's right to exist or that seek to undermine its legitimacy as a state

The Council also reaffirmed the church's long-standing call for the rejection of all forms of violence, incitement to violence, and teachings of hatred on all sides.

The Council maintained the decade-long policy of the United Church in affirming Israel as a Jewish state. While not formally adopted by the Council, the definition of Jewish state as "*a homeland for the Jewish people and a democratic state that ensures complete equality of social and political rights to all of its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or gender*" was noted in the working group's report and will receive further study. Similarly, the advice of the working group that the language of "apartheid" not be applied to Israel will also be studied.

The Council recognized that the Palestinian "right of return" was linked to the rights of all refugees in the world to return to their homes, and affirmed that a just resolution of this right for Palestinian refugees must be part of peace negotiations. However, it also affirmed that in this situation any resolution must protect the demographic integrity of Israel. The working group report noted that this could be accomplished through compensation and resettlement of Palestinian refugees in a new Palestinian state.

The creation of a viable and stable Palestinian state, a homeland for Palestinians, remains the basis of the search for justice for Palestinians. As the working group report detailed, however, the window for the creation of a viable Palestinian state is closing due to the continued presence and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. The settlements and the restricted roads linking them, together with the separation wall, annex land and make the creation of a viable Palestinian state increasingly unlikely. Under international law and the policies of most countries in the world, including Canada's, the settlements are illegal. The military occupation protects the settlements and imposes harsh restrictions on Palestinians' everyday life.

The Council has therefore called for the dismantling of settlements within the occupied territories, the end of all settlement construction, and the dismantling of the separation wall in all places where it crosses over the "Green Line." (The Green Line marks the line between Israel and the territories it captured in 1967. As the wall is currently constructed it contains approximately 10 percent of the land of the West

Bank.) The Council directed that United Church members be encouraged to avoid the purchase of settlement products, and that an information campaign on this issue be developed and offered to the church.

The Council confirmed the direction of the working group report that the church does not support the formal Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign, which calls not only for a comprehensive boycott of all Israeli businesses and products, but also for the full implementation of a Palestinian Right of Return.

The Council affirmed that while the United Church does recognize Israel as a Jewish state, it is not appropriate for the church, as it had done in the past, to call on Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish state as a prerequisite to peace negotiations. Palestinian Christians, in particular, challenged the church to rethink this issue. They argue Palestinians have already recognized Israel's right to exist but that Israel has not defined what it means by the term "Jewish state." Therefore it is unclear what affirming this will mean for the 20 percent of the population of Israel that is not Jewish. Palestinian Christians have expressed their desire that the new Palestinian state be secular and democratic. Affirming Israel's identification as a religious state makes it harder for those Palestinians who seek to ensure that Palestine does not also identify itself as a religious (Islamic) state.

The Council affirmed the importance of deepening relationships with Palestinian Christians. It called on United Church members, when travelling to the Holy Land, to make a special effort to see the situation through their eyes and to support Palestinian-based tourism.

The Council also noted the negative impact of the teachings of hatred against Palestinians by some Israeli settler communities, and denounced those teachings and the violence against Palestinians that they engender.

The Council affirmed the working group report as it related to the motions adopted at this General Council, and recommended the entire report and its recommendations to the members of the church for study, prayerful discernment, and personal action.

[Israel and Palestine Policy Frequently Asked Questions](#)  [PDF: 3 pp/121 KB]



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