

# United Church peace initiatives in Israel/Palestine

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presentation to

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# What would you like to know?

- Israel/Palestine history and background
- Sins of the Occupation
- Costs to Israeli Jews
- United Church Middle East policies
- The GC-41 Boycott Resolution 2012
- Settlement products and why boycott them
- What you can do

# Israel/Palestine history and Issues

## Jewish Voice for Peace video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y58njT2oXfE&feature=youtu.be>



# Settlements vs. Palestinian homes



# House Demolitions



# Inequitable sharing of water

West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territories, September 2009



Israeli settlers enjoy the swimming pool in the Maaleh Adumim settlement.



A water reservoir stands empty in Jiftlik, a Palestinian village in the Jordan Valley area.

# Palestinians can't use West Bank roads

- Most roads in the West Bank are barred to Palestinians.
- Israel tears up or blockades most local roads, making travel difficult and isolating people and villages.



# Military oppression of Palestinians



# The Wall



# Checkpoints and ID cards



# Destroying Olive Trees





# Impacts on Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza

- Loss of freedom and rights
- Destruction of homes, villages, land, water, and economy
- Damaged capacity to travel for work, health, education
- Torture, arbitrary imprisonment, daily humiliation, assassinations, wounds, trauma
- Poverty
- Brutal siege and military attacks in Gaza
- Family and community separation

# Impacts of the occupation on Israeli Jews

- Militarization of Israeli life
- Costs of maintaining occupation causes economic dislocation and inequality
- Democracy and free speech threatened for women, non-Orthodox Jews, Christians, and peace activists
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, wife abuse, addiction, suicide among soldiers
- Racism, intolerance, religious fundamentalism
- Israel's reputation collapsing

# Christian Relations with Jews and Israel

- After the Holocaust, many churches re-assessed views of Jews and Judaism
- Revised liturgy to delete anti-Semitism
- Formed Christian-Jewish ecumenical dialogue groups

# From Ecumenical Dialogue to Ecumenical Deal

- After the 1967 Occupation, Jewish faith partners demanded uncritical support for Israel to prove Christian repentance for historical sins against Jews.
- They called those who raised concerns anti-Semitic.
- The so-called “New Anti-Semitism” = criticism of Israel.

# United Church support for Justice

- Proud leadership on social justice issues such as same-sex marriage, residential schools, and the environment.
- The UCC supported Christian calls for boycotts in South Africa and the Sudan
- Al Forrest *The Unholy Land* 1970

# 2003 “Bearing Faithful Witness”

- Addressed anti-Semitism
- Affirmed Jesus was a Jew and the permanence of the Covenant with Jews
- Called for Jews to become faith partners
- No mention of Palestinian concerns. But affirmed legitimate criticism of Israeli policies

# 2006 Ethical investment for Peace in Palestine and Israel

- “Balanced” opposition to violence on both sides
- Opposed the Occupation & settlements
- Recognized “the legitimate rights of the State of Israel...to exist as a Jewish state”
- Problems with “ethical investment” (vs. divestment and boycott)

# 2007 World Council of Churches Amman Call

- Affirms Palestinian right to self-determination and right of return under UN resolutions and Geneva conventions.
- Any solution “must be viable”
- Jerusalem must be a shared city
- Israeli settlements and Separation Barrier are illegal and must be removed
- “Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action.” (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions)

# Christian Palestinians 2009 Kairos Palestine Document

- The Israeli occupation and its consequences are “sins” that blight the lives and souls of Palestinians & Israelis
- Calls on Christians to visit Palestine.
- Calls on churches to boycott and divest from companies profiting from the occupation.

# 2009 GC40 Measures Towards Peace in the Middle East

- Supports the Amman Call principles
- Opposes the occupation
- Supports Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state
- Directs General Council to find ways “including, but not limited to economic boycott”, to “move the two peoples toward reconciliation”.
- Recommends UCC “enter into consultation, dialogue, study and prayer”, and “to take appropriate action toward ending the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, and enter into conversation as to how to move the two peoples toward reconciliation (including, but not limited to economic boycott).”

# Working Group on Israel/Palestine Policy

- 2010 UCC General Council forms Working Group which interviews many on all sides here and in Israel/Palestine.
- May 2012 Working Group report calls for “avoidance” of settlement products and considering divestment.
- Balances support for Palestinians and Israelis.
- 8 UCC Presbyteries supported Working Group recommendations. None opposed.

# United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine/Israel (UNJPPI)

- Feb. 2012, grassroots United Church ministers, ecumenical accompaniers, and Youth 4 Peace founded UNJPPI
- Goal to support the Kairos Palestine Document and Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS).
- Similar movements in US Methodists, Presbyterians, & Quakers

# Israel Lobby attacks UCC

- Council on Israel and Jewish Advocacy launches all-out attack on UCC and boycott call.
- Biased survey, petition, 9 Senators
- Heavy lobbying of commissioners

# GC-41 Resolution

- Approved Working Group report with slight pro-Israel amendments
- Avoid settlement goods
- Urges Canadian government to label settlement goods and bar them from Free Trade preferential treatment
- Study divestment from companies profiting from the occupation.

# Why boycott settlement products?

- Christian Palestinians are asking us to do this.
- Boycott is a time-honored, effective, non-violent tactic.
- Settlements are illegal and immoral. They appropriate and destroy Palestinian homes, crops, water, and lives. They entrench permanent Israeli rule. The whole oppressive infrastructure supports settlements.
- In settlement industrial zones, Palestinian workers are paid 1/3 of Israeli minimum wage, no labor rights.

# What are Settlement Products?



# What difference will boycott make?

- Raises public awareness and political pressure
- Targets the key cause of the Israel/Palestine conflict.
- Puts economic pressure on oppressors: Soda Stream had a market cap of \$1.46 billion last year, and Ahava made over \$150 million.

# Concerns about taking action

- It might be anti-Semitic to criticize Israel. We might get called anti-Semitic if we support Palestinian justice.
- It's too complex. We don't know enough to take sides
- We must be "balanced."
- Israel is the real victim.
- We should focus on Canadian issues like First Nations rights.

# Response to those concerns

- Justice is a Christian and a Jewish value too.
- Name-calling is a tactic to deflect valid criticism.
- Education is a good start. It's not too complex.
- “Balance” in the face of injustice is unjust.
- Palestinians AND Israelis are victimized by Israeli colonial oppression.
- Canadian and Israeli colonialism against Aboriginal peoples are similar. Much unity, no need to choose between these causes.

# How you can help

- Write General Council to show your support for the resolution.
- Check out the General Council web site and join the action plans.
- Join the UNJPPI boycott campaign.
- Ask store managers to remove the product.
- Phone/write head offices of the Bay, Sears, Costco, Bed Bath and Beyond to ask them to remove Soda Stream.

Free Palestine Peace  
is the fruit  
of Justice

