

# **A CALL FOR THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO TAKE ACTIONS TOWARD A JUST PEACE IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT**

## **BACKGROUND STATEMENT**

The search for peace between Israelis and Palestinians has been a concern of the United Church of Christ for decades. Many General Synod resolutions have endorsed the peace process, advocated for a just and fair resolution to the conflict, involving Israel's secure existence next to a free and secure Palestinian state, condemned the building of the separation wall and encouraged the application of economic leverage to influence the Israeli government to engage in a just peace process.

### **United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network**

Discerning the need for a grass-roots movement to educate UCC members and call for implementation of these resolutions, a group of concerned UCC members, both volunteer and staff, organized themselves into the United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network (UCCPIN) in January 2012. Since that time UCCPIN has written a Mission Statement, put up a Facebook page, created a web site ([www.UCCPalestineIsraelNetwork.org](http://www.UCCPalestineIsraelNetwork.org)), and invited others to join us. At General Synod 29 (2013) UCCPIN sponsored a workshop and a table of resources. In 2014 PIN offered a model resolution, which has been modified, and is now being brought to General Synod 30 (2015) by four conferences. It would extend economic leverage to support the Palestinian civil society's call for boycott, divestment and sanctions.

### **The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement and Kairos Document**

In 2005 many segments of Palestinian civil society, frustrated with the lack of implementation of the Oslo Accords, which were supposed to lead to a Palestinian State in five years, and inspired by the struggle of South Africans against apartheid, issued a call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel. They also invited conscientious Israelis to support this Call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace.<sup>1</sup>

The Palestinian civil society BDS call, now led by the Palestinian Boycott National Committee has three stated goals:<sup>2</sup>

An end to the occupation

Equality for Palestinians now living in Israel; and

Recognition of Palestinian refugees' right of return.

UCCPIN chooses to focus particularly on the first of these goals believing that an end to the occupation is an essential ingredient for a just peace. Therefore, the resolution calls for divestment from and boycott of companies, which are benefiting financially from the occupation or from the military control of Palestinians. **PIN** believes that this step follows from actions already endorsed by previous Synods and is a faithful response to the Kairos

## Palestine Document.

In 2009 Palestinian Christians of many denominations issued the Kairos Palestine Document, *A Moment of Truth*,<sup>3</sup> patterned on a similar document written by South African Christians in 1985. They called it “A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering.” They described their reality under occupation and called out to their fellow Christians around the world to recognize their suffering and to engage in boycotts and divestment as a non-violent means of peaceful resistance. In April 2010, the UCC General Minister and President commended this document to churches and members. He suggested making four commitments:

Commit to read, study and reflect on the “Message of Hope” with fellow church members;

Commit to visit the region to learn more about the situation on the ground and non-violent responses to it;

Commit to advocate with the US government, the most influential party in the negotiations;

Commit to support denominational partners in Palestine, which supports the Palestinian economy, and to avoid products that are produced in illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank.<sup>4</sup>

Although Palestinian resistance to conquest and occupation has been ongoing since the days of the Ottoman Empire, the present boycott, divestment and sanctions movement has gathered considerable international momentum in the past nine years. Following questions by Quakers concerned about investments linked to the Israeli occupation, Friends Fiduciary, an investment firm serving over 300 Quaker institutions in the US, divested from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Veolia.<sup>5</sup> In 2013, the Mennonite Central Committee voted to divest from companies that benefit from products or services used to perpetrate acts of violence against Palestinians, Israelis and other groups.<sup>6</sup> In 2014 the Presbyterian General Assembly voted to divest from three companies that profit from the occupation.<sup>7</sup> Many Israeli individuals and human rights organizations support using boycotts, divestment and sanctions as do the US groups, Jewish Voice for Peace and the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation. Palestine solidarity groups have sprung up on campuses all over the US calling for their institutions to divest.

The United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA,) and the United Church of Canada have all voted to boycott settlement goods.<sup>8</sup> Two of the largest banks in Northern Europe, the Swedish Nordea Bank and the Norwegian Danske Bank have announced they will boycott Israeli banks because they operate in the Palestinian occupied territories.<sup>9</sup>

## UCC Responses

Within the UCC, the General Minister and President and the Executive Minister of the UCC’s Wider Church Ministries in October 2012 joined thirteen other ecumenical leaders in signing a letter to Congress calling on them to investigate whether Israel’s use of military aid provided by the United States violates US laws; specifically the US Foreign Assistance Act and the US Arms Export Control Act.<sup>10</sup>

For Advent 2012, the UCC's Collegium of Officers issued a pastoral letter calling upon church members "to make conscious decisions not to buy products which contribute to the denial of people's rights to livelihood, land, and property" and to "avoid purchasing" items such as Ahava Dead Sea skin care products, SodaStream home carbonation products, HP computers and peripherals, and Caterpillar products.<sup>11</sup>

Past General Synods of the UCC have endorsed numerous boycott campaigns, including those of the United Farm Workers, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, and the Immokalee Workers, and against companies such as Gallo, Taco Bell, Mt. Olive Pickles, Nestle, and Farah Slacks.

The General Synod of the United Church of Christ in 1985 endorsed the international campaign to divest from corporations in South Africa in order to press for the end of apartheid.<sup>12</sup>

### **Our Role as American Christians**

Why should American Christians care about the resolution of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict?

As members of one body in Christ, we are called to solidarity with our fellow Christians in the Holy Land, who have called us to pursue justice for them and their fellow Palestinians. Their hope is in a God of faith, hope and love and so is ours. With the Disciples of Christ we are in partnership with churches and organizations working directly with Palestinian Christians and with Israeli human rights organizations, which have extensively documented the human rights abuses to which Palestinians are subjected by the Israeli government, military forces and settlers.<sup>13</sup>

As American citizens and taxpayers we are complicit in these abuses by virtue of the \$3.1 billion we give to Israel in military aid every year. The US is now committed to giving Israel \$30 billion in military aid between 2009 and 2018, thus subsidizing one of the most powerful militaries in the world. Contrary to ordinary US policy, Israel is allowed to use approximately 25% of military aid to purchase equipment from Israeli manufacturers thus indirectly subsidizing Israel's arms industry.<sup>14</sup> UCCPIN believes these funds could be better used in our own communities to address the needs of America's poor.

In 2005 General Synod passed a resolution "Concerning the Use of Economic Leverage to Promote Peace in the Middle East".<sup>15</sup> In 2013 the Executive Council asked the Covenanted Ministries, United Church Funds and the United Church Pension Boards to submit reports to it as to how they had carried out the mandate of the Resolution. United Church Funds reported that they have been part of the Ecumenical Action Group for a Just Peace in Israel-Palestine since 2006. Its purpose is to coordinate engagements with US corporations profiting from the Israeli Occupation. "To ensure its ability to engage with companies most obviously profiting from the Occupation, UCF established a Social Action Fund with its own discretionary funds; that fund holds shares in Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola."<sup>16</sup> UCF has co-filed shareholder resolutions with these companies and intends to file with Microsoft. However, over eight years of corporate engagement have brought little modification in the behavior of these companies and none except Veolia

have yet withdrawn any of their operations from West Bank settlements or ended their lucrative contracts with the Israeli military. UCF has welcomed a UCCPIN Steering Committee member to its meetings and shared information about its corporate engagement work.

The Steering Committee of UCCPIN is now in dialogue with the Pension Boards of the UCC. They have responded to the 2005 Synod resolution on Economic Leverage by investing in the Siraj Fund which supports nineteen Palestinian companies. Although this is indeed a positive step in support of the Palestinian economy, it does not acknowledge Israel's complete control of the Palestinian economy, nor the enormous extraction of resources from the West Bank, which benefits the Israeli economy.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it cannot be viewed as a step toward ending the Occupation. The Pension Boards and United Church Funds have submitted their own resolution to the General Synod.

The World Bank issued a report on the Palestinian economy on September 23, 2012, which stated that “the sustainability of growth in the Palestinian territories depends upon increasing private investment” but that “restrictions put in place by the Government of Israel continue to stand in the way of potential private investment and remain the major impediment to sustainable economic growth,” citing restriction of movement of persons and goods, the fragmenting of the territory into small enclaves, the restrictions on land and water use, and the unavailability of land in Area C for development as some of the reasons why “the investment climate will remain unfavorable and business opportunities much below potential”.<sup>18</sup>

### **Why Target These Particular Companies?**

All of these companies are involved in supporting the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands in some way as documented by the Israeli organization We Divest<sup>19</sup>. In particular:

**Caterpillar** is a U.S. American firm that manufactures and provides bulldozers and civil engineering tools. It sells bulldozers to the Israeli army that are weaponized and used in the systematic demolition of homes and civilian infrastructure as part of the Israeli army's doctrine of urban warfare. The Caterpillar sales are covered under U.S. military aid to Israel. Caterpillar bulldozers have been used in war crimes in South Lebanon, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. They have also been used to demolish Palestinian homes in the West Bank as an arbitrary punitive measure and to build the Separation Wall<sup>20</sup> and illegal<sup>21</sup> settlements on occupied Palestinian land.

**Hewlett-Packard (HP)** is a global provider of computer products, including PCs, printers, servers, software, and IT services and solutions. HP provides ongoing support and maintenance to a biometric ID system installed in Israeli checkpoints in the occupied West Bank, which deprive Palestinians of freedom of movement in their own land and allow the Israeli military occupation to grant or deny special privileges to the civilians under its control. HP also provides the Israeli military with other equipment and services to help it maintain the illegal occupation. In the United States HP is one of the government's top 25 defense contractors.

**Motorola Solutions** is an electronics and telecommunication corporation that split from

Motorola Inc. in 2011. Through its subsidiary, Motorola Solutions Israel, the company profits from Israel's control of the Palestinian population by providing surveillance systems around Israeli settlements, checkpoints, and military camps in the West Bank, as well as by providing communication systems to the Israeli Army.

**Group 4 Securicor (G4S)** is a British-Danish security conglomerate that operates in 120 countries with a net worth of \$1 billion. Through its Israeli subsidiary, G4S provides security systems for Israeli prisons and detention centers in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. G4S has announced that it will end its role in Israel's prison system in 2017. However, it also provides security services for Israeli military checkpoints, businesses operating in illegal Israeli settlements, and the Israeli police headquarters in the occupied West Bank. Campaigns against it continue.

**Veolia** Israeli subsidiaries operate a settler landfill in the occupied Jordan Valley and dump Israeli waste from within Israel and from illegal settlements into the occupied area in violation of international law. Veolia Transdev, which through its subsidiary Connex, operated bus lines for settlers on segregated roads in the Palestinian West Bank, and other lines throughout Israel, has sold off all of its bus services in Israel/Palestine.<sup>22</sup> It still owns shares in the Jerusalem Light Rail and continues to operate it. The Jerusalem Light Rail is an infrastructure project connecting Jerusalem with Israeli settlement neighborhoods and settlements, designed by the Israelis on Palestinian land.

**SodaStream International**, registered in the Netherlands and Israel, manufactures and distributes home carbonation devices and flavoring for soft drinks. SodaStream's main production site is in Mishor Edomin, the industrial park of Ma'aleh Adumim, an illegal Israeli settlement in the West Bank. SodaStream has announced that it will move its production out of this settlement and into Israel proper, but has not done so as of February 2015.

**Ahava** manufactures cosmetic products using minerals from the Dead Sea. The company's factory and visitor's center is located in the Mitzpe Shalem settlement in the occupied Jordan Valley. In addition, Ahava is partially owned by the settlement.

**Hadiklaim** exports dates from Israel and from Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, especially in the Jordan Valley. The company markets most of the dates from the occupied Jordan valley and all the dates from the occupied Dead-Sea area. The company markets dates under the brand names of Jordan River, Jordan River Bio-Top and King Solomon, and under private labels of supermarket chains.<sup>23</sup>

### **A Resolution of Witness**

In view of all the conditions outlined above, UCCPIN believed the time had come to fulfill the clause of the 2005 Economic Leverage resolution mentioned above "to divest from companies that refuse to change their practices of gain from the perpetuation of violence, including the Occupation"<sup>24</sup>, and to boycott companies which profit from the occupation of Palestinian land, and therefore, proposed its model resolution.

End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bdsmovement.net/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bdsmovement.net/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://globalministries.org/mee/kairos/UCCDOCGM-Palestine-Kairos-April-2010.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> US Quakers sell shares over Israel policy concerns. Associated Press, October 3, 2012:

<http://www.bdsmovement.net/2012/quakers-divest-from-veolia-and-hewlett-packard-9599>.

<sup>6</sup> MCC U.S. board acts for peace through its investments. MCC, March 26 2013:

<http://www.mcc.org/stories/news/mcc-us-board-acts-peace-through-its-investments>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.pc-biz.org/PCBiz.WebApp\\_deploy/%28S%28bfyufw5kwvvs2hfu5kdnq5m%29%29/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4595](https://www.pc-biz.org/PCBiz.WebApp_deploy/%28S%28bfyufw5kwvvs2hfu5kdnq5m%29%29/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=4595)

<sup>8</sup> [www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/advocacy/boycott-101](http://www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/advocacy/boycott-101) and  
<http://www.kairosresponse.org/>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/176972#.Uv0\\_dxZChz8](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/176972#.Uv0_dxZChz8)

<sup>10</sup> “Religious leaders ask Congress to condition Israel military aid on human rights compliance.” The full text of the letter, dated Oct. 5, 2012, <http://globalministries.org/news/mee/pdfs/Military-aid-to-Israel-Oct-1-Final.pdf>.

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<sup>11</sup> “Let us respond to Christ’s message of justice and peace,” November 21, 2012, <http://www.ucc.org/news/this-advent-let-us-respond.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Proposal for Action on UCC Full Divestment of All Financial Resources from All Corporations Doing Business with South Africa, Minutes of the Fifteenth General Synod, 1985, pp.67-68  
[http://rescarta.ucc.org/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc\\_id=General+Synod+Minute%20s%2fucoc0000%2fUD000001%2f00000016&collection\\_filter=true](http://rescarta.ucc.org/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc_id=General+Synod+Minute%20s%2fucoc0000%2fUD000001%2f00000016&collection_filter=true).

<sup>13</sup> [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)

<sup>14</sup> [www.aidtoisrael.org](http://www.aidtoisrael.org) and <http://www.ifamericansknew.org/>

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.globalministries.org/israel\\_palestine\\_resolutions#2005a](http://www.globalministries.org/israel_palestine_resolutions#2005a)

<sup>16</sup> <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/EC-13-06-06c-United-Church-Funds.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/EC-13-06-06a-Pension-Boards-Report.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> *Fiscal Crisis, Economic Prospects: The Imperative for Economic Cohesion in the Palestinian Territories*, p. 4, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/AHLCReportFinal.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.wedivest.org/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.globalexchange.org/economicactivism/wallcheckpoints>

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.globalexchange.org/economicactivism/illegal>

<sup>22</sup> <https://wedivest.org/post/303/veolia-sells-bus-lines>

<sup>23</sup> All statements about these companies can be found at [www.whoprofits.org](http://www.whoprofits.org)

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.globalministries.org/israel\\_palestine\\_resolutions#2005a](http://www.globalministries.org/israel_palestine_resolutions#2005a)

For more information about the Israeli Palestinian conflict and UCCPIN actions see the web site: [www.uccpalestineisraelnetwork.org](http://www.uccpalestineisraelnetwork.org).