

DIVESTMENT: A NONVIOLENT MEANS OF ACTING FOR PEACE**OPTIONS**

Petitions from the General Board of Church and Society, MFSA and seven Annual Conferences propose that the UMC respond to the Middle East conflict by divesting from U.S. and other Corporations that contribute to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The occupation causes harm to the peoples and the economies of both countries. Petitions from the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) and Good News oppose divestment, saying it negatively affects the economy of Israel even when divestment is not aimed at Israel or Israeli companies or at companies that do business with Israel. MFSA and Annual Conference petitions concern only U.S. and foreign companies that sustain Israel's occupation of Palestinian land. The IRD and Good News further suggest that divestment may have negative consequences for Jewish-UMC relations when many Jewish peace groups in the U.S. and Israel support divestment as a just and peaceful strategy to deal with an unjust situation.

ISSUE

At issue is how the United Methodist Church can best use its moral authority and take nonviolent action to support justice, peace and security in both Palestine and Israel.

ANALYSIS

Resolution #312 of the 2004 UMC Book of Resolutions affirms and supports Israel's right to exist within secure borders, the rights of Palestinians to self-determination and formation of a viable state, and a just solution for Palestinian refugees. The 2004 GC voted, "The UMC opposes continued military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, the confiscation of Palestinians land and water resources, the destruction of Palestinian homes, the continued building of illegal Jewish settlements and any vision of a [Greater Israel] that includes the occupied territories and the whole of Jerusalem and its surroundings."

Although a number of peace plans have been initiated in recent years, the 40 years of military occupation and the confiscation of more land for illegal settlements in violation of UN resolutions continue unabated. Resources that might be used for needed domestic programs in Israel are diverted instead to maintain the occupation of Palestine and the militarization of the Israeli society.

There is an urgent and growing humanitarian crisis among the Palestinian people at this time, especially in Gaza, where lack of access to health care, extreme poverty, malnutrition, water shortages, collective punishment such as cutting off electricity, and the inability to farm agricultural lands. Violence has increased and according to the Israeli Human Rights group, B'Tselem, between September 2000 and March 2008, 4,604 Palestinians were killed by Israelis and 1,033 Israelis have been killed by Palestinians.

We acknowledge and lament the pain and suffering of both peoples and cannot, in sound Christian conscience, be silent in the face of that suffering. UMC policy "prohibits investment in enterprises that are so morally reprehensible that investment in these companies is not tolerated by the church." [Book of Resolutions, 2004, # 213.1, "Avoidance by Divestment"] Israel's continued confiscation of Palestinian land and water is morally reprehensible and companies that support this process should not be in our denomination's portfolios.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Recognizing that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the world's major sources of instability and that the U.S. is directly connected to this conflict and increasingly imperiled by its devastation, MFSA recommends that GC delegates support divestment as an effective nonviolent way to take action leading to peace in the area.

VOTE FOR:

Petition # (not assigned as yet), "Promoting A Just and Lasting Peace through Responsible and Ethical Investment" submitted by MFSA is the primary petition to support if published by the Petitions Committee in the DCA at General Conference. The MFSA petition was included by the Petitions Committee in (#80132 below). Because the MFSA petition contains substantially different and additional actions related to divestment, an appeal was made to the Petitions Committee to publish and include it in the DCA issued on the first day of GC. We have sent copies of the appeal letter and the full petition to members of the Financial Administration Committee where the divestment petitions have been assigned.

Petition # 80132-FA-NonDiscrimination, p. 793, "Divestment" is from multiple Annual Conferences, and calls on GBPHB and the General Council on Finance and Administration to review and identify companies that profit from sales of products or services that cause harm to Palestinians and Israelis and to begin phased divestment from these companies.

Petition # 80832-FA-NonDiscrimination, p. 897, "Socially Responsible Investment Taskforce" calls for formation of a task force to report back in 2012. This is a longer term response that does not take the place of petitions calling for divestment now.

Petition # 81241-FA-R312, p. 906, "Peace and Justice in the Holy Land" that calls upon GBPHS and GCFA to review investments of the church and undertake a process of phased, selective divestments as well as investments in companies that make a positive contribution, and GBCS to initiate a study of the feasibility of involving other UMC boards and agencies in divestment.

Petition # 80833-FA-R9999, p. 907, "Divestment and Caterpillar" calls for every UM to prayerfully consider divestment from Caterpillars, Inc. with the personal and pension assets under their control, and requests that investment managers, mutual fund companies, pension plans and bank trustees do the same.

VOTE AGAINST:

Petition #80503-C1-R9999, p. 277, "Oppose Divestment from Israel" that is much broader than opposing divestment and has many problematic statements that the UMC should not endorse.

Petition #80042-C1-R9999, p. 267, "Support for Israel" that includes factually inaccurate lines about "those who are trying to completely destroy the State of Israel" and some Annual Conferences adopting resolutions that would have UM organizations stop doing business of any kind with a corporation that did business with Israel or supported Israel in any way"

PLEASE NOTE: An excellent website, "Understanding United Methodist Divestment," has been set up at the following address: <http://www.unitedmethodistdivestment.com/>. The resources on this site should help delegates better understand the issues before them.

We are aware that delegates have received several letters signed by a UMC pastor and a Sister of the Order of St. Dominic urging GC delegates to vote against divestment. We believe these letters contain inaccurate and out-dated information as well as unfairly characterizing groups and individuals who are calling for divestment as an effective nonviolent strategy in working for peace. The letters have been responded to thoroughly on the "Understanding United Methodist Divestment" website.