



The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) is a wide coalition of the largest Palestinian mass organizations, trade unions, networks and organizations.

BNC member organizations:
Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine

Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)

Palestinian Nat'l Institute for NGOs

Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition

Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS (PTUC-BDS)

Federation of Indep. Trade Unions

Gen. Union of Palestinian Workers

Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions

Gen. Union of Palestinian Women

Union of Palestinian Farmers

Gen. Union of Palestinian Teachers

Gen. Union of Palestinian Writers

Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUUPE)

Union of Professional Associations

Gen. Union of Palestinian Peasants

Union of Public Employees in Palestine-Civil Sector

Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (STW)

Nat'l Committee for Grassroots Resistance

Pal. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)

Nat'l Committee to Commemorate the Nakba

Civic Coalition for the Defense of Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem

Coalition for Jerusalem

Union of Pal. Charitable Organizations

Palestinian Economic Monitor

Union of Youth Activity Centers-Palestine Refugee Camps

Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Initiative

United Methodists Call for Boycott of “products made by Israeli companies operating in occupied Palestinian territories”

Adopting the “Kairos Palestine” document, Methodists Elevate Palestinian Rights and Israel Divestment to Mainstream Prominence

“Every worthwhile accomplishment, big or little, has its stages of drudgery and triumph; a beginning, a struggle and a victory.” --Gandhi

Occupied Palestine, 3 May 2012 – The General Conference of the United Methodist Church decided yesterday to call for an explicit boycott of all Israeli companies “operating in the occupied Palestinian territories,” knowing that this constitutes the absolute majority of Israeli corporations. This and the overwhelming support for the “Kairos Palestine” document and its call “for an end to military occupation and human rights violations through nonviolent actions,” which include boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS), will pave the way forward for further action by the Church to hold Israel accountable for its colonial and apartheid regime.

Although the General Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) fell short of voting for divestment from three U.S. corporations that are actively complicit in Israel’s protracted occupation and serious violations of international law, the inspiring awareness raising and advocacy campaign waged by human rights activists within the Church and in many communities outside it has succeeded in elevating Israel divestment and the struggle for Palestinian rights to mainstream prominence. Notwithstanding this decision, four annual (regional) conferences within the UMC have already adopted Israel divestment resolutions.

The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC), the broadest coalition of Palestinian political parties, trade unions, NGOs and networks, whose BDS Call is supported by Palestinian church groups from all major Christian denominations, salutes all the people of conscience, especially within the UMC, who relentlessly, meticulously and with immense selflessness labored to convince the Church to align its investment policy with its ethical principles that reject injustice and oppression. Caterpillar, Motorola and Hewlett Packard should not take too much comfort in this temporary setback; while they are off the hook for now, many more people today know exactly what these companies are doing in violation of international law and will soon hold them accountable.

As a result of repeated disinformation and fear mongering by some Church officials responsible for its investment branch, a majority of UMC delegates still feel that divesting from companies profiting from human rights violations is a considerable and unnecessary sacrifice. The widely expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people, and with Palestinian Christians in particular, who overwhelmingly called on the Church to divest, was thus not translated into action that heeds the moral obligation to do no harm. By continuing to invest in companies that profit from the Israeli occupation and human rights violations, and despite all intentions, the UMC is still doing harm to the Palestinian people through its financial complicity in maintaining the occupation.

Efforts by BDS activists from around the world are sending a strong message to corporations that their collusion in Israel's unlawful occupation and serious violations of international law is under scrutiny and will not be tolerated. A recent research report exposed Hewlett Packard's role in sustaining the occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people, with its supply of biometric monitoring systems to Israeli military checkpoints inside the occupied West Bank and technological solutions to Israel's army and illegal colonial settlements, contributing to the caging of Palestinians in fragmented ghettos¹. Motorola provides surveillance systems for Israeli settlements, military bases and the apartheid wall, and communications equipment to the Israeli occupation army.²

The General Conference, taking place this year in Tampa, FL, meets every four years and is the only entity that speaks for The United Methodist Church.³ The process and international debates leading to the vote on this divestment resolution mark a milestone in the persistent efforts of Christians around the world and Methodists in particular to bring concrete meaning to a long-standing ethical Church position in support of ending Israel's occupation and human rights violations. The setback notwithstanding, this debate over how best to hold Israel accountable for human rights violations is largely viewed as ushering in a new phase in faith groups' activism for Palestinian rights reminiscent of similar measures that eventually contributed to dismantling South African apartheid.

The impressive mobilization in support of this divestment resolution united people from diverse backgrounds, including scores of Jewish human rights activists, mostly associated with Jewish Voice for Peace, who proudly spoke out for an end to church material support to Israel's occupation.⁴ It constitutes a distinguished contribution to the Palestinian people's struggle to achieve its full set of human rights, which includes also full equality for Palestinians citizens of Israel, and the right of return of Palestinian refugees as guaranteed by international law. UMC activists, who led this effort with diligence and utmost attention to accuracy, moral consistency and effective advocacy, deserve warm praise and gratitude from all of us struggling for a just peace in Palestine and the region. The supportive role of the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation in this mobilization must also be acknowledged and commended. While the profound obligation to "do no harm" was not honored by many in the General Conference, it has become a rallying cry for human rights activists everywhere, including within the Church. This setback notwithstanding, we are confident that campaigns of misinformation and vilification by well-oiled pro-Israel lobbies and putting profit ahead of principle by some will not for long drown the voices of the many Methodists who stand, in word and in deed, behind Palestinian freedom, justice and equality.

¹ <http://www.whoprofits.org/HP>

² <http://www.endtheoccupation.org/section.php?id=209>

³ http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.8038525/k.D58F/How_General_Conference_Works.htm

⁴ <http://www.rabbisletter.org/>

In 2009, prominent Palestinian Christians issued the “Kairos Palestine” document⁵, a historic theological manifesto that seeks inspiration from a similar document issued in 1985 by South African theologians, detailing their vision for justice and the obligation to resist injustice. Kairos Palestine explicitly advocates BDS against Israel until it meets its obligations under international law.⁶ The following year, United Methodist clergy and laity from the US responded to the “Kairos Palestine” document with grassroots educational and research efforts to understand the full extent of the impact of UMC investments that directly result in the oppression of Palestinians. These efforts culminated in the resolution⁷ presented at this year’s General Conference and voted upon by the 988 delegates present from around the world.

A recent report by the Presbyterian Church (USA), whose divestment resolution will come to a vote at the general assembly scheduled for July, shows that years of engagement -- 8 years, to be exact -- with Caterpillar, which supplies Israel with bulldozers used to wantonly destroy Palestinian property and build apartheid infrastructure, have failed to convince the company to change its behavior thus making divestment an imperative.⁸ Targeted divestment is, therefore, the minimum required to express effective solidarity with Palestinians languishing under and resisting Israel’s occupation, colonization and apartheid.

The BDS movement has opened space for much needed debate in the U.S. public sphere about Israel’s three-tiered system of oppression against Palestinians and is now becoming a household name. The road to ultimate victory over oppression, as Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr. teach us, is never straight or paved with flowers; every turn and decline are opportunities to learn how to persevere and to rise stronger against the challenges ahead.

We salute the genuine moral voices in the United Methodist Church for their sincere efforts to put truth to action, to bring justice and freedom for all in the land that is the birthplace of Christianity.

⁵ <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/>

⁶ <http://www.bdsmovement.net/call#.T5pJwMR-urI>

⁷ https://www.kairosresponse.org/The_Resolution.html

⁸ <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2012/4/25/mrti-holds-long-sought-meeting-caterpillar/>