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## Divestiture of Funds that Support Israeli Occupation of Palestinian Territories

Written: 6/11/2005

*Synopsis by Susanne Hoder:*

The New England Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church on June 11 passed a resolution calling for voluntary selective divestment from companies that profit in a significant way from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. This measure is similar to initiatives being considered by several other Christian denominations. The Presbyterian Church USA adopted a selective divestment measure last year. A number of Jewish groups in the United States, Israel, Europe, and South Africa have also called for selective divestment as a tool to end the Israeli occupation.

Together, these actions will send an unmistakable message to the Israeli government that people around the world are waking up to the realities of the occupation and will not stand by while Palestinians have their land, water and basic human rights taken from them. The occupation endangers Israelis as well as Palestinians, and measures that seek to end it can benefit all the people of the region.. According to a Chicago Jewish group, Not in My Name, "the Occupation is not only destroying Palestinian society, but Israeli society, as well. Selective divestment from companies that profit from this destruction is not only appropriate, it is both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli."

The United Methodist resolution calls on the U.S. government, the government of Israel, and the newly elected Palestinian leadership to reject all acts of aggression and violence, to respect the equality and dignity of all the region's people, and to forge solutions based on the principles of international law and human rights. It also affirms the right of Christians, Jews, and Muslims to freedom of movement in this land that three faiths call holy, and affirms the maintenance of Jerusalem as an open city for people of all three faiths.

The resolution appears below:

RS – 204 – RESOLUTION ON DIVESTING FROM COMPANIES THAT ARE SUPPORTING IN A SIGNIFICANT WAY THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES  
(submitted by Washington Park UMC and Mathewson St UMC, Providence, RI, Barrington, RI UMC and RIUMA)

Whereas we believe in the absolute equality of all God's children, and reject all efforts to dominate or to subjugate others based on religion, race or ethnicity,

Whereas we embrace the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses, which forbid stealing, coveting the land of one's neighbor, and taking human life,

Whereas we honor Micah's call in the Old Testament to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God, and we follow Christ's call to love our neighbors as ourselves,

Whereas we reject all violence and acts of provocation that lead to violence, believe in the right of all peoples to security, and believe that security for one people can never be achieved by denying security to others,

Whereas we are called to support members of Christ's church around the world, including Palestinian Christians who are being forced to leave the Holy Land due to Israel's confiscation of their property and the severe hardships of living under occupation,

Whereas the Fourth Geneva Convention forbids an occupying power from moving its own people into territory it occupies, and there are currently more than 400,000 Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian

territories, with thousands of new settler housing units being planned and constructed,

Whereas Palestinian land is still being confiscated for these settlements and for construction of the separation wall deep inside the Palestinian territories,

Whereas the settlements and Israel's wall on Palestinian land violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions, and numerous United Nations Resolutions, and whereas settlement expansion violates the Declaration of Principles signed by the parties in Washington in 1993, and the requirements of the Roadmap signed in 2003,

Whereas a number of American and Israeli Jewish peace groups, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and other religious leaders have called for selective divestment from Israel as a means of ending settlement expansion and ending the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands,

Whereas the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in 2004 passed Resolution 312 entitled "Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land" which called for an end to the occupation of Palestinian land by Israel,

Whereas the United Methodist Church should not profit from the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian land or the destruction of Palestinian homes, orchards, and lives,

Whereas we are committed to ensuring that our denomination's money is used in a manner consistent with our beliefs, with international law, and with Christ's teaching,

Therefore, be it resolved that a committee be created to examine and submit to United Methodist churches and investment managers in the New England Conference within six months a list of companies that support in a significant way the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, and to maintain the list and constantly re-evaluate the relationship of companies to the occupation. Such committee should have two representatives from each state in the New England Conference, appointed by the Church and Society Committee in consultation with the appropriate district superintendents in each state, and should meet monthly until an initial divestment list is developed, and quarterly thereafter. Before placing a company on the list, the committee should write to that company, explain the committee's concerns, and request a change in the company's relationship to the Israeli occupation. If no change in policy is reported within 60 days as being taken or contemplated, the company's name should be placed on the divestment list along with explanatory details and shared with the New England Conference.

Be it further resolved that United Methodist churches and investment managers in the New England Conference are encouraged to examine their portfolios to see whether current investments include companies on the divestment list described above. Those who find they are holding investments in such companies are urged to consider divesting from them.

Be it further resolved that the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church calls on the U.S. government, the government of Israel, and the newly elected Palestinian leadership to reject all acts of aggression and violence, to respect the equality and dignity of all the region's people, and to forge solutions based on the principles of international law and human rights.

Be it also resolved that we affirm the right of Christians, Jews, and Muslims to freedom of movement in this land that three faiths call holy, and that we affirm the maintenance of Jerusalem as an open city for people of all three faiths in accordance with Resolution 312 of the United Methodist 2004 General Conference Book of Resolutions.

#### Supporting Statement

Despite renewed talk of peace between Israelis and Palestinians, the hard reality is that Israel's actions on the ground in the region, as well as Palestinian militant attacks on Israelis, place enormous obstacles in the way of progress toward peace.

The urgency of the humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories cannot be overstated. Palestinians face soaring unemployment, malnutrition, restrictions on movement, denial of medical care, denial of access to their agricultural lands, humiliation at checkpoints, and extended lockdowns called curfews. More than 4 million Palestinian refugees live in poverty, while Israelis live in their homes and farm their lands.

Israel continues to take the land of the Palestinian people for ever-expanding settlements, Israeli-only roadways, and the construction of a giant wall and fence that is confiscating a significant portion of the Palestinian land in the West Bank. 83% of the West Bank's water has been taken for Israeli use, leaving Palestinians with desperate water shortages. Israel has destroyed the homes of more than 28,000 Palestinians in four and a half years. Hundreds of thousands of ancient olive trees and vast tracts of agricultural land have also been destroyed.

Israel has built a ring of Jewish settlements around Arab East Jerusalem, impeding access to the West Bank for Jerusalem's Arab residents and ensuring that Palestinians cannot use East Jerusalem as the

capital of a future Palestinian state, which has been called for by every major peace plan.

In 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled by 14-1 that Israel should halt and dismantle the Wall being constructed illegally in occupied Palestinian territory, and make reparation for the damage arising from its unlawful conduct. Palestinians continue to alternate between often-futile non-violent protest and unacceptable violent attacks on Israelis. Israeli soldiers have repeatedly fired on non-violent protesters, killing and 2 wounding not only Palestinians, but international peace activists – including Americans – who have stood with them. In addition, volunteers with the Christian Peacemaker Teams in the West Bank have been attacked by Israeli settlers while escorting Palestinian children to school. Settlers have been involved in many acts of violence against Palestinians.

Palestinian Christians are being forced to leave the Holy Land. Their land and water has also been taken by Israel. They now comprise less than 2% of the West Bank's population, and there are very real fears that soon there will be no Christian presence in the land of Christ's birth. Those who remain are calling on Christians everywhere to reject the policies that are driving them and their Muslim neighbors from a region their ancestors have inhabited for more than 2000 years. Many recall a time when Christians, Jews, and Muslims lived in harmony together in this land, and believe it can happen again when people of all religions are accepted as equals, with full rights to life, liberty and property.

Our Christian faith calls us to reject violence of any kind, and to reject acts of aggression that provoke violence. As United Methodists, we are committed to work for justice, and to refuse to be complacent in the face of such monumental human suffering. We are also called to support other members of the Body of Christ around the world.

It is not expected that United Methodist divestment activity or that of any other religious denomination will significantly affect Israel's economy or the bottom line of major US companies, but this is not the goal. The goal is to make all United Methodists and other Americans aware of their relationship to companies that benefit from the Israeli occupation and give them an opportunity to withdraw from such relationships, so they are not participants in human rights violations that violate Christian principles and international law. Another, equally important goal is to give hope to Palestinians, including our Christian counterparts in the region, and let them know they are not forgotten.

Christ has called us to be a light to the nations, to replace darkness and despair with hope rooted in love for all God's creation. Refusing to be a part of an illegal occupation that endangers Israelis as well as Palestinians is an effective way to show our light to the world.

In addition, the conference passed the following amendment (proposed by Bob Hannum) to the above resolution:

AMENDMENT: Be it finally resolved that we urge our United Methodist funding agencies and our local churches to support with our prayers, presence, and money, those Israeli, Palestinian and international organizations, which bring Israelis and Palestinians together in dialogue, and work daily for peace with justice for both peoples. A list of such organizations will be provided to the above mentioned committee.