

Act for Peace in the Middle East

Virginia Annual Conference of The
United Methodist Church

Whereas we affirm Israel's right to exist within permanent, recognized and secure borders, and Palestinians' rights to self-determination and formation of a viable state; and

Whereas there has been some renewal of hope for peace in the Middle East as new Palestinian leadership has emerged through elections, and Israel has announced plans to evacuate its Gaza settlements, both providing a limited welcome momentum for building peace; but

Whereas vacating Gaza settlements will mean the removal of only about 8,000 Israeli settlers out of a total settler population of nearly 445,000, with the vast majority of settlements continuing to thrive and prosper with almost 4,000 new settlement dwellings in the Palestinian Territories under construction;

Whereas to make room for such illegal settlements Israel has illegally demolished hundreds of Palestinian homes, leaving thousands of Palestinians homeless; destroyed hundreds of acres of olive trees, devastating the Palestinian economy; and confiscated thousands of acres of land in the Palestinian territories for Israeli settlements; and built over 200 miles of exclusive settlement access roads, all of which has placed nearly half of the Palestinian Territories under settler use and control;

Whereas the above illegal destruction of Palestinian homes and economy, and confiscation of Palestinian land, is made possible by the use of armored bulldozers, helicopters, gunships, tanks and other equipment supplied to Israel by multinational corporations that profit from such violent and deadly activities;

Whereas, "The United Methodist Church opposes continued military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, the confiscation of Palestinian 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;"

Whereas The United Methodist Church holds that a boycott is "a legitimate Christian response to an identified social or economic injustice," and has joined major boycotts such as one initiated in 1977 against the Nestle Company because of its marketing of infant formula in developing countries, a boycott against Royal Dutch Shell endorsed in 1988 because its connections to the apartheid system in South Africa and, most recently joining, in May 2004, a boycott against Taco Bell restaurants because of the sub-poverty wages paid to farm workers for picking tomatoes used in Taco Bell food products, all of which were resolved with significant social justice gains such as changes in Nestle's marketing practices, abolition of apartheid

in South Africa, and significant gains in wages for farm workers thereby demonstrating the substantial impact The United Methodist Church and other religious bodies can make when joining struggles for justice and peace;

Therefore, be it hereby resolved that the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church:

1. Calls upon the United Methodist Board of Pensions to review its investments and undertake a process of phased, selective divestment from any multinational corporations profiting from illegal demolition of Palestinian homes, destruction of Palestinian economy and confiscation of Palestinian land, following United Methodist guidelines which require a period of information gathering and evaluation of alternative means of intervention before undertaking a boycott.

2. Calls upon the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society to initiate a study of the feasibility of advocating a wider form of phased, selective divestment from any multinational corporations profiting from the illegal and violent activities noted above.

3. Requests the United Methodist General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns to develop and promote wider avenues of engagement between Christians, Muslims and Jewish communities pursuing justice and peace.

-Hunter Mabry, on behalf of the Virginia Chapter