Promoting a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel

A Guide for United Church of Christ Faith Leaders

August 2016

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Introduction

In the 2009 *Kairos Palestine* document, *A Moment of Truth*, Palestinian Christians called on the churches of the world to "stand alongside the oppressed" in Palestine-Israel. They asked our churches, "Are you able to help us get our freedom back?"

In 2015, the 30th General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted the resolution "A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" (click here): www.uccpin.org/#!resolution/c10d6

This guide provides resources to equip UCC lay and ordained faith leaders to study and implement the resolution. The resolution's goal is to contribute to ending the Israeli military occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories: the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

The UCC resolution does not call for a blanket divestment or boycott of Israel. Rather, it calls only for divestment from companies which are complicit in and/or profit from human rights violations arising from occupation of the Palestinian Territories by the state of Israel, and for boycott of products produced in illegal Israeli settlements located in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

I. The Current Urgent Situation

Context

The situation in Palestine is first of all a crisis of land dispossession. This series of maps demonstrates how fragmented and reduced Palestinian geography has become since 1947, due to Israeli military aggression and colonization, or "settlements."

A Common View of Palestine-Israel (1967)

Palestinian Loss of Land 1947 to Present

Map images: Palestine Israel Action Group of Ann Arbor Friends Meeting (Quaker)

The West Bank

Palestinians in the West Bank have lived under Israeli military occupation since 1967. Israel continues to confiscate Palestinian land and demolish Palestinian homes and businesses in order to build segregated Jewish-only settlements within the West Bank. These settlements violate the Fourth Geneva Convention. (This treaty prohibits an occupying power from relocating its citizens to occupied territory. Israel has signed this treaty.) Israeli settlements in the West Bank are identified as illegal by the international community, including the United Nations, numerous individual countries, humanitarian agencies and official United States policy.

One tool for land confiscation is the Israeli-constructed "Separation Wall." Now more than 400 miles long and, in many places, 25 feet tall, the Separation Wall does not follow the internationally recognized border (set by the 1949 Armistice between Israel and its Arab neighbors and known as the "Green Line"). Instead, nearly 85 percent of the Wall is inside the West Bank. The Wall separates many Palestinians from their families, schools, hospitals, places of employment, centers of commerce and houses of worship. The presence of the Wall prevents many Palestinian farmers from traveling to and tending their fields and orchards. As a result, Israeli military forces seize the untended fields as "abandoned." (The UCC adopted a resolution calling for the removal of the separation barrier at its General Synod in 2005. www.globalministries.org/israel_palestine_resolutions#2005b)

A section of the Separation Wall near Bethlehem. Photo: Mark E-W

Israel has built hundreds of permanent and mobile military checkpoints throughout the West Bank. At these checkpoints, Israel subjects Palestinians to long delays and closures, limiting their freedom to travel or transport goods both within and beyond the borders of the West Bank. Further, Israel has instituted a system of expensive, difficult-to-obtain "travel passes" constraining Palestinian freedom of movement. Israel denies Palestinians access to the segregated "bypass roads" it has built for Israeli settlers. Israel has reduced what remains of Palestinian land in the West Bank to small, isolated, noncontiguous areas.

Israel controls all major water sources in the West Bank and allocates roughly 80 percent of the supply to Israeli settlements, manufacturing and military purposes. At the same time, it routinely destroys Palestinian wells and cisterns. Many Palestinians receive less than the minimum sufficient amount of water per day established by the United Nations and the Red Cross. Many go for months at a time without running water for their homes, farms or businesses.

Imposed water shortage – three Palestinian children collecting water from a tap. Photo: B'Tselem/Atef Abu A-Rob

Although Israeli settlers in the West Bank enjoy the rights and protections of Israeli civil law, Israel places Palestinians under military law. This means that Palestinians are subject to arbitrary arrest and can be imprisoned indefinitely at any time without charge, legal counsel or trial. Human rights organizations substantiate arrests and torture not only of Palestinian adults, but also of Palestinian children.

Thus, the current urgent situation is one of theft and colonization of Palestinian land together with myriad human rights violations.

East Jerusalem

Children standing on the ruins of their East Jerusalem home demolished to build the Wall. Photo: B'Tselem/Yehezkel Lein

Shortly after conquering the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the 1967 war against Jordan, Israel illegally annexed the Palestinian city of East Jerusalem and extended the city's boundaries by incorporating (annexing) additional land from the West Bank. Israel appropriates Palestinian homes and businesses for Jewish colonization. It routinely denies Palestinians building permits. Through roadblocks, searches, arrests, tear gassing, spraying sewage water on Palestinian homes, and outright killing of Palestinian men, women and children, Israel creates perverse incentives for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem to move elsewhere. Additionally, Israel imposes crippling administrative rules to revoke or deny residency rights of many Palestinians who wish to continue living in – or move to – East Jerusalem.

Gaza

Gaza is a coastal strip of land just 22 miles long and eight miles wide. With a population of 1.8 million, it is one of the most densely populated places on earth. Although Israel withdrew its Jewish settlers from Gaza in 2005, it maintains a crippling siege on the area, employing an air, land and sea blockade, with ongoing military incursions (see for example U.N. report www.prc.org.uk/portal/images/PDF_files/WS-Gaza.pdf).

Israel conducted full-scale bombardments of Gaza in 2008, 2012 and 2014 in which thousands of Palestinian men, women and children died. During these bombardments, the Israeli military targeted and demolished much of Gaza's civilian infrastructure, many residential neighborhoods, schools, hospitals and places of worship, as well as Gaza's once-vibrant fishing industry.

Gaza fisherman with remains of his boat bombed by Israeli military.
Photo: B'Tselem/Mohammad Sabah

Israel imposes severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza, resulting today in poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition and disease (especially among children), and inadequate medical care. So limited is access to building supplies, that in mid-2016, nearly two years after the 51-day bombardment of Gaza in 2014, some 100,000 men, women and children of Gaza remain homeless, lacking even rudimentary shelter.

II. Biblical and Theological Grounding

Some Jews and Christians understand the biblical promises of land by God to Israel to be literal and eternally binding. This perspective denies legitimacy to Palestinian claims. It consequently justifies West Bank settlements, the annexation of East Jerusalem, the establishment of an Israeli capital in all of Jerusalem and control over the holy sites of Muslims and Christians.

Other Christians understand some texts of the Bible to grant the modern state of Israel a divinely ordained role in the narrative of "end times" – resulting in the final and eternal rule of Christ as sovereign over all. For these Christian Zionists, political support for Israel sustains God's promised future for Christians. Some Jews welcome this political support for a Jewish state that Christian Zionists offer. (The UCC adopted a resolution critical of Christian Zionism at its General Synod in 2003. www.globalministries.org/israel_palestine_resolutions#2003)

Both of these readings reinforce political policies sanctioning massive United States military aid to Israel. Both views logically lead either to the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland or their subservience to a dominant Jewish state.

A Christian church in the shadow of Israel's illegal Separation Wall (note sniper tower which forms part of the Wall).
Photo: F/J Buttrick

A third view, however, draws different lessons from Scripture. The United Church of Christ, along with many of our U.S. and global ecumenical and interfaith partners, stands in the Reformed tradition of covenantal relationships. We understand that God does not draw political maps or assign particular roles to states, but calls us to establish personal, political and institutional practices that will enable justice, peace and abundant life for all to flourish. These values were further articulated in 1985 when the United Church of Christ declared itself a just peace church.
www.ucc.org/justice_just-peace
Speaking from the hope in the Gospel that God's peace (shalom) is a gift promised for all, the pronouncement offered with prophetic conviction the vision that "peace is possible." It called on churches to explore the intersections between peace and justice by adopting practices such as nonviolent direct action, supporting the reduction of offensive weapons and the arms trade, and participating in grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations. In 2015, General Synod re-affirmed its commitment to being a Just Peace Church: www.uccfiles.com/pdf/GS30-JUST-PEACE.pdf

This justice-seeking, peace-making and life-affirming vocation leads members of the United Church of Christ to acknowledge that under current circumstances neither justice nor peace nor life is flourishing in Palestine or in Israel. And while this is the case for Israeli and Palestinian alike, the burden of suffering falls most heavily on the occupied Palestinian people—who are subject to extreme security measures; denied access to ancestral homes, fields and holy sites;

impeded in movement for employment, health care, education and familial relationships; and vulnerable to home demolition and expropriation. The current limits on justice, peace and life for Palestinians, and the looming threats to the same for Israelis absent the establishment of a just peace, demand urgency rather than complacency, indifference or resignation.

III. Summary of the UCC General Synod Resolution

The resolution adopted at General Synod 30 encompasses a fourfold action strategy by the United Church of Christ to help end the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Educational Empowerment

Study of the *Kairos Palestine* document*, A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* (2009).

Economic Leverage

Divestment from companies that profit from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and boycott of products manufactured in illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Political Advocacy

Petition of Congress to ensure that aid to Israel violates neither the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act nor the U.S. Arms Export Control Act.

Interreligious Dialogue

Active engagement among the three Abrahamic faiths aimed at reaching religious reconciliation and achieving a just political resolution.

Link to the General Synod Resolution: www.uccpin.org/#!resolution/c10d6

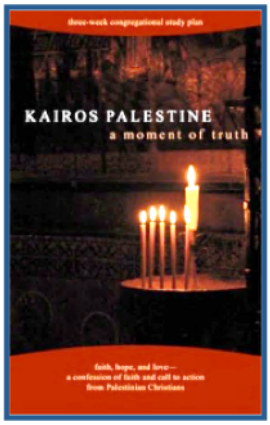
IV. Educational Empowerment

What the UCC resolution calls for

The resolution "calls upon the United Church of Christ churches and church members to study thoughtfully the *Kairos Palestine* document, as well as other perspectives on the occupied

Palestinian territories, to reflect upon the theological truths within the *Kairos Palestine* document, and to take heed of its call for non-violent measures pressuring Israel to end the occupation in solidarity with the Palestinian people suffering under occupation."

The *Kairos Palestine* document



Kairos Palestine document.

The *Kairos Palestine* document, *A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering*, was issued in 2009 by Palestinian Christian leaders after decades of peace talks had reached what they called "a dead end." The document describes the suffering of the Palestinians, asks for help from the international community and provides a theological statement on how the occupation should be addressed.

Kairos Palestine is a word of ***faith*** because it affirms a good and just God who loves and creates every human being in God's image, bestowing human dignity on each person. *God created us not so that we might engage in strife and conflict but rather that we might come to know and love one another, and together build up the land in mutual respect* (2.1). *Thus any use of the Bible to legitimize or support injustice is wrong* (2.4). Therefore, our UCC response to the occupation must focus first and foremost on the defense of vulnerable human life and the promotion of human rights, political rights and economic rights for those to whom these rights have been denied. This response bears witness to the God in whose compassion the poor, the hungry and the sorrowful are "blessed" (Luke 6:20-21).

Palestinian children living in a U.N. refugee camp near Bethlehem.
Photo: Anonymous

Kairos Palestine is a word of ***hope*** that reveals *the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us. . . Hope means not giving in to evil but rather standing up to it and resisting it* (3.2). *Hope is based on the belief that God's goodness will prevail* (3.1) *and in the Resurrection* (3.5). UCC members are called to reject both the despair which leads to submission or violence and the indifference that settles for our own comfort at the expense of another's suffering. Hope requires costly solidarity with those who suffer. It is based on our conviction that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

Kairos Palestine is a word of ***love*** that rejects violence while embracing resistance. *Love is seeing the face of God in every human being. Every person is my brother or my sister. However,*

seeing the face of God in everyone does not mean accepting evil or aggression on their part. Rather, this love seeks to correct the evil and stop the aggression (4.2.1). *Resistance is a right and a duty for the Christian. But it is resistance with love as its logic* (4.2.3). Love calls UCC members to reject a false peace imposed by the threat of military violence. It calls us instead to practices of nonviolent resistance. This theological stance responds to the admonition that we must "not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all" (Romans 12:17).

We of the UCC reject the belief that God's ancient promises privilege the map for some today at the expense of others. We reject the belief that God's salvation rests on a blueprint that requires the suffering of many. Instead, we claim the words of the authors of *Kairos Palestine*: *The Resurrection is the source of our hope. Just as Christ rose in victory over death and evil, so too we are able, as each inhabitant of this land is able, to vanquish the evil of war. We will remain a witnessing, steadfast and active Church in the land of the Resurrection* (3.5).

Kairos Palestine invites church members to come and see the situation, to speak the truth about the reality, and to practice boycott and divestment as *tools of nonviolence for justice, peace and security for all* (6.3).

Kairos Palestine **resources**

The *Kairos Palestine* document can be found here (click here):
http://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-us/kairos-palestine-document

The UCC and Disciples provide this response to the *Kairos Palestine* document:
http://www.globalministries.org/palestinian_christian_kairos

The Kairos USA organization provides a "Call to Action" and a study guide:
www.kairosusa.org

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) also provides a useful study guide:
http://www.pcusa.org/resource/kairos-palestine-document-and-study-guide

V. Economic Leverage

What the UCC resolution calls for

The resolution calls upon churches and church members to "divest any direct or substantive indirect holdings in companies profiting from or complicit in human rights violations arising from the occupation of the Palestinian Territories by the state of Israel" and to "boycott goods identified as produced in or using the facilities of illegal settlements located in the Occupied Palestinian Territories."

Boycott and divestment are acts of resistance in obedience to our covenantal obligations as people of faith, hope and love. They are grounded in *faith* because they honor the dignity of the oppressed. They witness to *hope* because they testify to God's ultimate victory and are intended to encourage Palestinians in their hope. They are acts of *love* because they reject violence even while confronting evil.

These practices recognize that the urgency of this moment requires more than words. They are a response to the plea of those who are suffering and a rejection of the condescension that assumes that Bible verses can justify the subjugation today of millions of people – Christians, Muslims and others – by a powerful colonial regime.

Boycott: A Nonviolent Strategy That Works

Why boycott?

Boycotts are a powerful tradition with deep American roots both within and beyond the Church. Boycotts have been successful in social justice campaigns, including the U.S. civil rights movement and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Boycotts are moral, effective and nonviolent.

Image by artist Banksy on a wall near Bethlehem.
Photo: F/J Buttrick

Boycotts are a grassroots movement that can achieve change when a situation seems intractable at a governmental and political level.

Hundreds of Palestinian trade unions and trade associations, refugee and human rights groups, and cultural, civic and academic organizations have called for boycott and divestment in the 2005 *Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS.* http://tinyurl.com/grwj8jq

Also, as cited earlier in this guide, Palestinian Christian leaders have issued a call for boycott (and divestment) in the 2009 *Kairos Palestine* document. http://www.kairospalestine.ps/index.php/about-us/kairos-palestine-document

What the UCC resolution calls for

The resolution "calls upon all entities of the United Church of Christ to boycott goods identified as produced in or using the facilities of illegal settlements located in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including, but not limited to Ahava skin care products, SodaStream products and Hadiklaim dates, and upon church members to join boycotts of such goods in their local communities; and for such boycotts to end when these companies cease operations in the illegal settlements."

Update: Soon after passage of the resolution, SodaStream ceased manufacturing its products in the illegal Israeli settlement Ma'ale Adumim – a notable success for the BDS movement. Ahava announced an intention to leave the settlements, but because it has not yet done so, remains a target for boycott.

New boycott targets: Airbnb and RE/MAX have become the focus of boycotts because they profit from the rental and sale of properties located in the illegal settlements.

What's wrong with companies that produce goods or services in illegal Israeli settlements?

All Israeli settlements and settlement industries in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are in violation of international law according to Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states that an occupying power shall not transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.

United Nations Resolution 446 affirms that the illegal Israeli settlements "constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East."

The Israeli settlement enterprise commits numerous human rights violations. It forcibly evicts Palestinian families from their homes, businesses and farmlands. It destroys Palestinian villages, crops and livelihoods. It restricts the stolen land for exclusive use by a single ethnic group.

Settlement companies illegally plunder the West Bank's precious natural resources, including water, minerals and agricultural produce.

Settlements discriminate against Palestinian workers by not granting them the same labor rights and and civil rights as their Israeli coworkers.

Boycott: getting started

Most important: connect with a core group of committed activists. Experienced activists can guide you through the inevitable questions, issues and challenges that will occur as you lead members of your church in an economic boycott. To find such activists, look for church-affiliated or secular "peace and justice" committees in your area. Join an existing boycott or divestment effort. If none is available, consult the UCC Palestine Israel Network for advice. Go to www.uccpin.org (click on "Contact") or send an e-mail to info@uccpin.org.

Give everyone in your congregation a solid understanding of the situation in Palestine-Israel. The value of starting with the type of study specified in this guide cannot be overemphasized. Education is the place to start. Once your boycott or divestment efforts become public, many conversations—and likely some differences of opinion—will ensue. It is important that everyone in your church be aware of the reasons for the boycott effort.

Variety of boycott actions to consider

Make a personal pledge not to buy offending products. The BUYCOTT mobile app allows shoppers to scan barcodes of food products to determine whether they contribute to the Israeli military occupation.

Spread the word about companies complicit in the military occupation, and about your boycott campaign. Conduct adult education classes. Use social media, newspapers and other local media to inform the public about the harm done by companies doing business in the illegal settlements.

Ask local civic organizations, labor unions and other groups with similar human rights concerns to support your campaign.

Establish a "military occupation free" policy for your local municipality, including boycott (and divestment) with regard to city contracts, purchases and investments. Your city may already have a "socially responsible investment screen" in place. If so, apply these principles and guidelines to companies invested in the military occupation.

Ask manufacturers to stop making the offending products. Ask individual stores and headquarter offices to stop buying or selling the products. Ask distributors to avoid distributing the products.

Do sidewalk informational leafleting.

Devise other creative actions – conferences, flash mobs, prayer vigils, public art, musical presentations, symbolic actions, plays and drama, messages projected by video onto large walls, YouTube videos, public advertising, marathon complaint sessions to store managers, film series, educational seminars and more. Let your imagination flow!

Divestment: A Powerful Form of Economic Pressure

What is divestment?

To divest is simply to sell one's holdings in a company. These holdings, whether owned by individuals or institutions, usually take the form of stocks or corporate bonds.

The negative publicity from a divestment campaign can create a tarnished reputation and lower sales (thus lower profits) and also a higher cost of capital (which further reduces profits). Companies targeted for divestment thus have a powerful incentive to cease those activities that support the Israeli military occupation.

What the UCC resolution calls for

Photo: US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation

The resolution "calls upon the United Church of Christ Board, the Pension Boards–United Church of Christ, Inc., United Church Funds, conferences, local churches, members, and other related United Church of Christ entities—to divest any direct or substantive indirect holdings in companies profiting from or complicit in human rights violations arising from the occupation of the Palestinian Territories by the state of Israel, including, but not limited to Caterpillar Inc., Motorola Solutions, Hewlett-Packard Company, G4S, and Veolia Environmental and its subsidiaries until such time as these companies no longer profit from or are complicit in said human rights violations."

Update: Soon after passage of the resolution, Veolia sold all of its businesses operating in the Occupied Territories—another BDS victory—and can now be crossed off the list. G4S announced it would not renew its contracts to help build and run Israeli prisons; however, until it actually ceases those activities, it remains a legitimate target for divestment. Hewlett-Packard split into two successor companies, HP Inc. and Hewlett Packard Enterprise, both complicit in the Israeli military occupation and thus legitimate targets for divestment.

Why target these specific companies?

Weaponized Caterpillar bulldozers are used to demolish Palestinian infrastructure. Motorola Solutions provides communication equipment to the Israeli military. Hewlett-Packard has developed and maintains a biometric identification system used at checkpoints to restrict Palestinian movement and maintain control of the Palestinian population. Documentation of the specific human rights violations these companies commit is provided by the AFSC investment screening tool described below. Years of effort by the Ecumenical Advocacy Group (of which the UCC is a member) to persuade these companies to change their business practices have proven futile. Three of the named companies are American. All do business in the U.S.

An investment screening tool

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has developed a screening tool for evaluating specific companies' complicity in the Israeli military occupation. AFSC's criteria, along with a list of companies recommended for divestment, can be found here: http://investigate.afsc.org/screens/occupation Directions for using the screening tool are listed here: http://investigate.afsc.org/screens/investors

Personal divestment

As a first step, work with your personal financial advisor to divest your holdings from the named companies in order to familiarize yourself with the process and to encounter the practical questions that arise.

Working with your local church to divest its holdings from the named companies

Step 1: Educate the members of your church, including the Board of Trustees. Ensure they are aware of the human rights abuses in Palestine-Israel. Assist them in accessing and understanding the UCC resolution calling for divestment from holdings in the named companies.

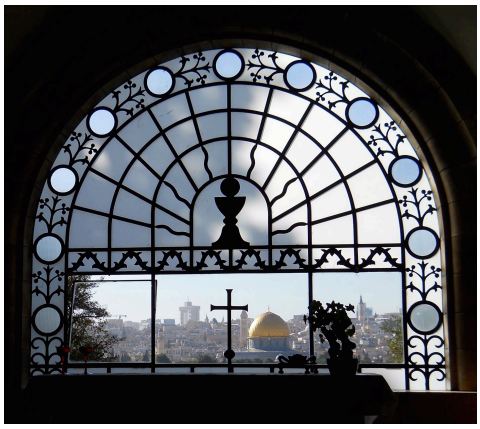
Step 2: Engage your Board of Trustees in a collaborative way. Hear and address any concerns they may have about the divestment process. Determine the extent (if any) of church holdings in the named companies. If necessary, seek support from your congregation.

Step 3: Decide which current holdings (if any) to remove. In addition, establish a process to avoid future purchases of stocks or bonds from companies complicit in the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory.

Working with your UCC Conference to divest its holdings from the named companies

The process of working with your UCC Conference is similar to working with your local church. Enlist a small team of committed church members (preferably representing more than a single congregation) to assist you.

Engage the Conference Minister and lay leaders (especially the Conference Moderator, Treasurer and Investment Advisor) in a collaborative way. Hear and address their concerns. Once again, education is key. Should you reach an impasse, seek approval of a divestment resolution at your Conference's annual meeting.



View from a church window in East Jerusalem. Photo: Thomas Bell

VI. Political Advocacy

What the UCC resolution calls for

The resolution "calls upon the United Church of Christ Officers and church members to persist in the request to Congress, previously made by a number of religious leaders, to ensure that U.S. aid to Israel violates neither the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act, which prohibits assistance to any country that engages in a consistent pattern of human rights violations, nor the U.S. Arms Export Control Act, which limits the use of U.S. weapons to 'internal security' or 'legitimate self-defense.'"

The U.S. Foreign Assistance Act and Arms Export Control Act as bases for action

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and the Arms Export Control Act of 1976, together with a provision of the Foreign Assistance Act called the "Leahy Amendment" or the "Leahy Law," form the legal basis for many petitions calling for U.S. government sanctions against Israel. These laws deny military assistance to countries engaged in severe human rights violations. http://www.endtheoccupation.org/downloads/Policy_Paper_print.pdf
See also http://www.humanrights.gov/dyn/an-overview-of-the-leahy-vetting-process.html

Despite these laws, U.S. taxpayers provide more than $3 billion worth of military support to Israel each year – more than to any other country in the world. This funding enables maintenance and expansion of the military occupation, and the use of disproportionate force, as detailed here:
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/12session/A-HRC-12-48.pdf

In October 2012, UCC leadership joined ecumenical colleagues in bringing this concern before Congress. The UCC resolution calls on all of us to support that call and to pressure Congress to uphold these laws by withholding military aid from Israel.

Actions you can take

Pressuring Congress to take action is something you can do by yourself, with a group at your church, or in league with a local civic group or even your entire UCC Conference. Every personal meeting with or call, email or letter sent to a member of Congress helps.

The US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation (www.endtheoccupation.org) and the

Long queues at Israeli military checkpoints and denial of the right to travel in one's own country are constant facts of life for many Palestinians. Photo: F/J Buttrick

No Way to Treat a Child campaign (www.nowaytotreatachild.org) have launched initiatives and petitions focused on specific sanctions. Consider joining these efforts and connecting with their networks of skilled educators and activists.

Global Ministries and UCC Justice and Witness Ministries regularly send out action alerts on many issues, including on Palestine-Israel and in support of the resolution. To sign up to receive these action alerts, visit Global Ministries at http://www.globalministries.org/join and the Justice and Witness Ministries Justice and Peace Action Network at http://www.ucc.org/join_the_network

VII. Interfaith Dialogue, Partnership and Action

What the UCC resolution calls for

The resolution "commends United Church of Christ leadership for continuing to dialogue with major Jewish organizations and calls for United Church of Christ–wide participation in a rigorous dialogue among the three Abrahamic faiths at all levels—in particular between local congregations—that will be resourced with materials from the Wider Church Global Ministries Middle East and Europe office in order to identify ways in which groups of congregations of different faiths can work in concert to promote sacred reconciliation among all people who are affected by the conflict in the Middle East and to influence public policies in ways that will promote peace and social justice for Palestinians and Israelis and end violence in all its forms."

Clarifying the issue

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, here speaking at a conference in Germany, endorsed the UCC resolution
Photo: Wikimedia/Elke Wetzig

Remember that the issue at hand is the military occupation of Palestine by the government of Israel—*not* the relationship between Jews and Christians in the United States. At its core, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a religious conflict; rather, it is a political and economic conflict over land, resources and demography. There are diverse perspectives within the American Jewish community and therefore a variety of ways to engage. There is no inherent contradiction between our advocacy for ending the occupation and our faithful and healthy relationship with the Jewish and Muslim communities. Jewish Voice for Peace, American Muslims for Palestine, and the US Campaign to End the Occupation are good partners in advocacy.

Initiating conversation

If you feel called to initiate conversation at the congregational level, invite Muslims, Christians and Jews to share their stories about their relationships and experiences with Palestine and Israel. Engaging people's hearts can make people more receptive to learning about the situation and imagining peace. Additional tips and resources can be found here: http://traubman.igc.org/peace.htm#how-to

The UCC and the American Jewish community have been active together for decades on many issues of social justice, including civil rights. Our two communities share many similar outlooks and engage on many issues of common concern. Our relationships are deep-rooted and precious. There are often differences with some Jewish colleagues and organizations on this issue, which has caused tension and pain in our relationships because we come with different partners and narratives.

The UCC works closely with covenanted mission partners in Palestine-Israel. They provide us accurate information, local contacts, volunteer opportunities and powerful insight. They welcome our visits. In turn, their representatives travel to the U.S. to educate congregations and church leaders about the current situation "on the ground." Prior to traveling to Palestine-Israel, contact Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at www.globalministries.org to schedule a visit with one or more of these mission partners and/or our mission personnel currently serving there.

VIII. Encountering Resistance

The false promise of "positive investment"

Some may suggest that rather than boycotting or divesting from companies that profit from the Israeli military occupation, we should invest our funds in the Palestinian economy. "Positive investment" alone, however, will not work. A fundamental dismantling of Israel's system of military occupation is required. See Sam Bahour, "Palestine's Investments Require Divestment," Huffington Post, updated Sep. 24, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-bahour/palestines-investments-re_b_1703563.html

Anti-BDS legislation

Some people who disagree with our stance on peace and justice are working to promote legislation that punishes persons or institutions that engage in boycott and divestment actions even though these are peaceful, nonviolent, constitutionally protected forms of protest. Legislation that punishes this form of free speech is wending its way through many state legislatures, and some states have already passed such bills. Be prepared to oppose such initiatives. Organizations working to combat anti-BDS legislation are Jewish Voice for Peace

(www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org), Palestine Legal (www.palestinelegal.org), Friends of Sabeel—North America (www.fosna.org) and the US Campaign to End the Occupation (www.endtheoccupation.org) as well as the National Lawyers Guild and the Center for Constitutional Rights.

Of note is the June 2016 statement of the United Church of Christ Executive Ministers Team, opposing an executive order by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. Find their powerful words in defense of free speech and economic leverage here: http://tinyurl.com/haqywys

Expense-paid trips to Israel for UCC pastors and lay leaders

Some organizations offer all-expense-paid trips to Israel for selected individuals whose opinions they seek to influence. Such trips and the groups that lead them bear close scrutiny. Their itineraries are often designed to provide only a pro-Israel point of view and virtually no experience of the Palestinian reality. Ask questions about these free trips, if you or your local UCC leaders are asked to participate. Who is financing the trip? What are the points of view, mission and intention of the trip? Who are the tour guides and local presenters, and with whom are they affiliated? Will the itinerary include East Jerusalem? The West Bank? Will participants meet Palestinians living and working in Palestine? How does the organization providing the trip understand the words *Palestine, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Arab* or *Palestinian*? What are the expectations of participants after their return home? Should your UCC leader choose to participate in such a trip, encourage him or her to contact UCC Global Ministries to set up meetings with our own mission partners while abroad. Also, refer him or her to this guide to responsible travel in Israel-Palestine: http://tinyurl.com/hs5xthj

Efforts to undermine your educational event

Throughout this implementation guide and in the UCC resolution, educational underpinnings are emphasized. Educational initiatives require free exploration and safe spaces to discover realities not regularly described in U.S. media or churches.

As the planner of an educational event regarding Palestine, it is helpful to be aware of known tactics sometimes used to undermine or even cause cancellation of such events. Some of these tactics are listed below. For each tactic we provide one or more simple steps you can take to minimize or eliminate altogether the possible negative impacts of the tactic.

We recommend that you begin your planning process by creating a simple, clear statement of purpose, for example, “The purpose of this event is to explore justice issues and nonviolent solutions in the Holy Land from the Palestinian perspective” or “The purpose of this event is to study the Kairos Palestine document of the Palestinian Christian community and its call for nonviolent activism.” This written statement will come in handy when you explain to your host group (church or other organization) the purpose of the event. This can also serve as a reference for advertising your event or for correcting negative comments which may be made about your event.

Tactics used by opponents and how to prevent or deflect them

Tactic 1: Pressuring your host venue or event sponsors to cancel or withdraw from the event on the basis of false accusations of anti-Semitism, lack of "balance" or the supposed danger your event represents

Your educational event on Palestine justice issues, Kairos theology or current realities of the military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem may be challenged as "unbalanced," "anti-Semitic" or even "dangerous." Strong pressure may be applied to the host venue for your event (church, campus, community center) or to the leaders of the sponsoring bodies (pastor, staff, officials).

The best way to deal with this possibility is to discuss fully ahead of time the aims and agenda of your planned event. Meet with your host group (including the pastor and board of directors if your host group is a church). Your meeting has two aims: first, to assure these stakeholders that your event is wholly about education and support for basic human rights and that it is not anti-Semitic or "dangerous" in any way; and, second, to caution your host group and leaders about the possibility of public or private opposition from pro-Israel sources within the community. We thus encourage you to review the aims of the event and the backgrounds of each of the invited presenters. Answer any questions these stakeholders may ask. Especially for public events advertised beyond your own congregation, caution your host group and leaders about the possibility of opposition from pro-Israel sources within the community. We recommend using a "home space venue" (e.g. the home church of a planning team member) for your event.

For a public event, create a network of co-sponsors to provide support and grassroots connections. Contact Jewish Voice for Peace for assistance in sponsorship and planning, and for Jewish participation that supports a Palestinian justice focus. For a local church event, remember that it is appropriate and necessary for your congregation to plan events and educational opportunities that provide new information, safe spaces for discussion, and free exchange of ideas according to your own priorities and plans.

Some opponents to Palestine education events have even gone so far as to send letters of "concern" to event hosts, suggesting that expensive "security staff" are needed. You alone can judge this, but in our experience this simply wastes limited resources.

It is possible that opponents may stage protests outside the event you are hosting. These protests are meant to silence the Palestinian narrative that is given so little voice. In our many years of hosting educational events, we have not experienced any violence from protestors.

Tactic 2: Pressuring you to offer a "balanced" agenda by including speakers with opposing viewpoints

Don't allow others to mandate your agenda, even if they say it is in the interest of "balance" between Palestinian and Israeli points of view. Your event has every right and reason to focus on the rarely heard Palestinian voice and reality. You are not required to make your event a public forum, debate, or even "dialogue" which almost always moves the conversation away from Palestine-related issues. Such a change in focus robs participants of the opportunity to learn new information with full freedom to ask questions and explore new ideas.

In the United States, the vast majority of mainstream media reports are wholly unbalanced, offering only a pro-Israel point of view and featuring Israeli (but not Palestinian) voices. And remember that there is no "balance" in this conflict: the parties do not have symmetrical power or access to media. Accordingly, your event is an attempt to offset this imbalance. Your group always has the option of planning a subsequent event that includes different participants or dialogue formats. However, when first learning about justice issues in Palestine it is appropriate (and long overdue) to focus clearly on Palestinian history, experience and perspective.

Tactic 3: Trying to minimize potential attendance

Opponents of your public event may pressure community members not to attend or your church members to call for cancellation. They may smear your speakers with false allegations and inaccurate "quotations." This tactic has, at times, been used against respected Nobel Peace Prize nominees and recipients (such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu) when they speak about Palestinian justice. Don't let outrageous charges or criticism throw you. The controversy could even build interest in your event, especially if opponents' baseless charges are challenged or refuted by your own editorials in local media.

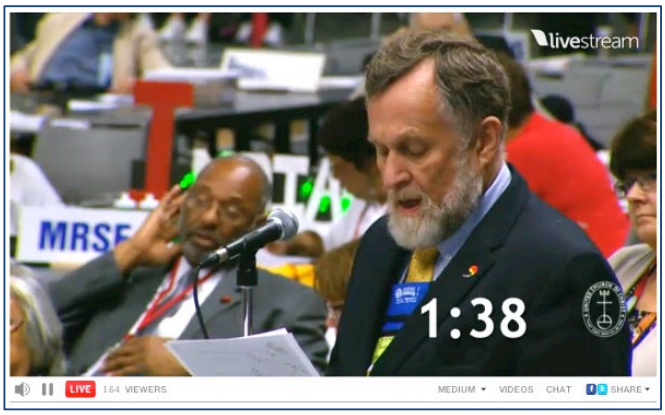
As you plan a public event, name a "rapid response" team of two or three people who will respond to any challenge and speak on behalf of the event should this be needed. Identify ahead of time a single person who will speak publicly on behalf of this event—ideally someone with experience in speaking to the media and knowledge about the issues regarding Palestine.

Tactic 4: Taking control of discussion periods to monopolize the time or to redirect discussion away from the speakers' core ideas

We've all seen how just one or several attendees at a conference can "hog the microphone" during Question & Answer sessions following speaker presentations. Too often, attendees with "axes to grind" will use the microphone to make their own pronouncements (rather than to ask questions of the speakers) or to redirect the conversation in nonproductive ways. Knowing this can occur, we recommend asking participants to submit their questions on 3" x 5" notecards. The completed cards can be handed to a facilitator or to the speaker (or panel of speakers) for thoughtful reply without questioners monopolizing time through extended speeches or accusations.

A Word of Reassurance

It hurts to be accused of bad motives, unfairness, racism, anti-Semitism or any activity which is framed as morally repugnant or harmful to the church community or the wider community. Your own integrity will strengthen you against such charges, and you are free to defend fellow church members accused of any of the above. Confidence in the church community to study controversial issues displays trust in the Body of Christ, not disregard or lack of respect.



The Rev. Dr. John Deckenback speaking in favor of the resolution. Image: United Church of Christ

Therefore, don't allow this list of possible challenges to discourage you! The United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network (UCC PIN) is experienced in planning and orchestrating educational events, and we are here to help. Call us to assist in planning. Contact us should problems arise (see contact information at the end of this guide). This work is vitally important, and we in the United Church of Christ are uniquely prepared to do this work. Once again, we are moving to the forefront of a struggle for justice. This is where we belong.

IX. Resources

Denominational, interfaith and secular partners

- United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network (UCC PIN) www.UCCPIN.org and www.UCCPalestineIsraelNetwork.org
- UCC Global Ministries www.globalministries.org
- United Church of Christ's Justice and Witness Ministries www.ucc.org/justice
- Defense of Children International www.dci-palestine.org
- Friends of Sabeel–North America ("Sabeel" or "FOSNA") www.fosna.org
- Jewish Voice for Peace www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org
- Middle East Children's Alliance www.mecaforpeace.org
- No Way to Treat a Child www.nwttac.dci-palestine.org
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)–Israel Palestine Network of the Presbyterian Church (IPMN) www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org
- United Methodist Kairos Response www.kairosresponse.org
- US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation www.endtheoccupation.org
- Kairos USA www.kairosusa.org

Curricular resources

- The *Steadfast Hope* booklet and DVD provide valuable context and may be ordered from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) bookstore at www.pcusastore.com. Each section of the *Steadfast Hope* DVD may also be viewed on YouTube.

Devotional resources

- Worship, Bible study and personal devotion provide grounding for activism www.uccpin.org

Timely news and information

- The Electronic Intifada http://electronicintifada.net
- Mondoweiss http://mondoweiss.net
- B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories http://www.btselem.org
- Christian Peacemaker Teams http://cpt.org
- If Americans Knew http://ifamericansknew.com
- Al Haq Palestinian Human Rights Organization http://alhaq.org

A Beginning Reading List for understanding the Palestinian context

Each of these books offers valuable personal insights. It is not necessary to read them all, but any of them will assist an understanding of the history, theology and/or justice issues involved.

Ateek, Naim Stifan. *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009. A Palestinian liberation theologian discusses scripture in relation to the creation and maintenance of Israel as a Jewish state and the way to a just and peaceful future.

Baltzer, Anna. *Witness in Palestine: A Jewish American Woman in the Occupied Territories.* Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007. In this diary of her work as a human rights volunteer in Palestine, Anna Baltzer brings the struggles of ordinary Palestinians to life with riveting text and colorful photos and maps.

Braverman, Mark. *A Wall in Jerusalem: Hope, Healing, and the Struggle for Justice in Israel and Palestine.* New York: Jericho Books, 2013. A Jewish psychotherapist shows how Christian and Jewish support for political Zionism is at the heart of this seemingly perpetual conflict and betrays the values of both religions.

Chacour, Elias. *Blood Brothers: The Dramatic Story of a Palestinian Christian Working for Peace in Israel.* Updated Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014. A Palestinian Christian cleric looks back on his experience of dispossession and discrimination in Israel and his effort to soften his heart and the hearts of others.

Halper, Jeff. *An Israeli in Palestine: Resisting Dispossession, Redeeming Israel.* London: Pluto Press, 2008. An Israeli anthropologist describes the continual dispossession of the Palestinians as Israel seeks to Judaize Palestinian land through oppressive military orders, home demolitions and violence.

Peled, Miko. *The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine.* Charlottesville, VA: Just World Books, 2012. The son of an Israeli general, whose niece was killed by a suicide bomber, describes how his family became advocates for the Palestinians and how he learned to sort out Israeli propaganda from the truth.

Raheb, Mitri. *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014. A Palestinian pastor describes "a theology for and from the Palestinian context" in which God is a factor in geopolitics.

Tolan, Sandy. *The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew, and the Heart of the Middle East.* New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2006. The true story of a Palestinian and a Jew united by the house he was forced to leave and that her family moved into. The stories of these individuals span the history of Palestine-Israel to 1998.

Global Ministries (immediately below) also provides an extensive, annotated reading list for the Middle East Region.

Educational material and opportunities for coordinated activism

- Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) provides a multitude of helpful educational resources at www.globalministries.org/israel_palestine and www.globalministries.org/mee_resources_index
- UCC general resolutions on Israel/Palestine from 1967 to the present day are available at www.globalministries.org/israel_palestine_resolutions
- Friends of Sabeel–North America www.fosna.org
- Jewish Voice for Peace www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org
- Tree of Life Educational Fund www.tolef.org
- US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation www.endtheoccupation.org
- American Muslims for Palestine www.ampalestine.org
- Faith Forum on Middle East Policy www.facebook.com/FaithForumOnMiddleEastPolicy/

Alternative travel (sometimes called "responsible travel") fosters relationships with resident Palestinians and opportunities to witness firsthand the impact of military occupation.

- In the Footsteps of Jesus, led by UCC Global Missioners Janet and The Rev. Jeff Wright, who have long worked with the Kairos Palestine movement in Bethlehem www.footstepsofjesustour.org
- Grace Tours www.grace-tours.com
- Tree of Life Educational Fund www.tolef.org
- Alternative Tourism Group www.atg.ps

- Friends of Sabeel–North America www.fosna.org/trips
- Joint Advocacy Initiative – Olive Harvest Tour www.jai-pal.org
- Wi'am Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center www.alaslah.org
- Siraj Center www.sirajcenter.org
- Interfaith Peace-Builders www.ifpb.org
- Global Ministries' People to People "Upcoming Trips": www.globalministries.org/trip_calendar

Films

- *Israel Palestine 101* (by Jewish Voice for Peace)
- *Roadmap to Apartheid*
- *Occupation 101*
- *Five Broken Cameras*
- *Budrus*
- *The Stones Cry Out*
- *The Wanted 18*
- *Where Should the Birds Fly?*
- *Life in Occupied Palestine: Eye Witness Stories & Photos* (by Anna Baltzer)

X. Contact UCC PIN for assistance, counsel or additional information

The best way to contact experienced UCC Palestine-Israel justice educators and advocates is through the www.uccpin.org website (click on "Contact") or via an e-mail sent to info@uccpin.org.

We are eager to help you in planning, strategizing, resourcing and troubleshooting. Describe your need and we will respond as quickly and helpfully as we are able.

Feedback for this guide

We welcome your feedback. Please send feedback and suggestions to info@uccpin.org.

This guide was created by a task force of the
United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network.

Cover photo by Mark E-W.