

Commissioner's Resolution – Standing For Reconciliation and Ending Affiliation With Divisive Coalition

Recommendation:

Whereas, recognized leaders of the international, secular, and organized Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement have explicitly called for the end of the Jewish State of Israel, embraced and encouraged violence by children and teenagers in the “knife intifada,” and opposed the types of reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis that the Scriptures demand of us,

The 222nd General Assembly shares the concerns expressed by the United Methodist Church General Conference, meeting in Portland in May 2016, and calls upon all PCUSA Church entities, including mission networks, to refrain from financial support and affiliation with the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, an umbrella organization of BDS advocate groups, due to its opposition to peacemaking tactics that can create a lasting peace for all people in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Rationale

The reconciling message of Jesus Christ is a far more powerful tool in the pursuit of peace than those methods utilized by the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement. In the Gospels, and in the letters of Paul, we read how Jesus sought to humanize, rather than demonize the “other.” The gulf between the Gentiles and Jew in the first century was as divisive, if not more, than those between Israelis and Palestinians today. Jesus taught us to love our enemies, not divest from them. In Galatians, Paul writes that we are neither Gentile nor Jew, but all one in God's eyes. It is in the context of the teachings of Jesus that this resolution is submitted, with the hope that the General Assembly can see behind the terribly divisive approaches and politics that have driven the Church in recent years.

The U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation is the primary American arm of this secular BDS movement. As the United Methodist Church described it in their General Conference legislation disassociating the Church from this organization: “This one-sided political coalition's website (www.endtheoccupation.org) reveals that its agenda includes seeking “to isolate Israel economically, socially, and culturally,” and promoting “comprehensive divestment” against Israel, while overlooking anti-Israel aggression. Blaming only one side while ignoring the wrongdoing of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran will not advance the cause of peace.”¹

The BDS movement claims to be a human rights campaign to secure justice for Palestinians, yet its stated goals make it clear that its true goal is to see the de-legitimization and end of the Jewish State. Omar Barghouti, founder of the BDS movement uses the “right of return” of Palestinian refugees to argue, “If the refugees were to return, you would not have a two-state solution, you'd have a Palestine next to a Palestine.”² The end result of which would be to “end Israel's existence as a Jewish State.”³ Barghouti was the keynote speaker at the PCUSA Israel Palestine Mission Network conference in 2015.⁴

The underlying goal of BDS is clear: the replacement of a Jewish State of Israel with a single Palestinian state consisting of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. While the world's diplomatic community seeks to create two states in which the West Bank is an autonomous political entity, the

BDS movement is not content with such an effort. They seek to merge the West Bank, Gaza and Israel into one state that will be governed by the Palestinian majority. The PCUSA has supported ending the occupation of portions of the West Bank with an important contingency: Israel remains a Jewish state and Israel's security is ensured.⁵ Yet, the words of BDS proponents present a very different goal:

“The real aim of BDS is to bring down the state of Israel... that should be stated as an unambiguous goal. There should not be any equivocation on the subject. Justice and freedom for the Palestinians are incompatible with the existence of the state of Israel.” – As’ad AbuKahlil.⁶

“Peace or better yet, justice, can not be achieved without a total decolonization (one can say de-Zionation) of the Israeli state.” – Michael Warshawski.⁷

“I think the BDS movement will gain strength from forthrightly explaining why Israel has no right to exist,” – John Spritzler⁸

“Good riddance! The two-state solution for the Palestinian-Israel conflict is finally dead. But someone has to issue an official death certificate before the rotting corpse is given a proper burial and we can all move on and explore the more just, moral and therefore enduring alternative... the one-state solution... where, by definition Jews will be a minority” – Omar Barghouti.⁹

The affiliation of the Presbyterian Church (USA) with such voices is a disgrace to the reconciling message of Jesus Christ. For far too long, we have permitted an anti-Israel faction¹⁰ within the Church to dictate policy and to advocate for policies which would effectively call for the end of the Jewish State of Israel, and which would in no way advance peacemaking in a way that Jesus would ever support. That faction is proud of its affiliation with BDS.¹¹

The association between BDS and violent insurrection cannot be understated. In October 2015, the BDS movement issued a statement of solidarity with the “Palestinian popular resistance,” when the current wave of terrorism against Israeli civilians began.

“Whether the current phase of Israel’s intensified repression and Palestinian popular resistance will evolve into a full-fledged intifada or not, one thing is already evident—a new generation of Palestinians is marching on the footsteps of previous generations, rising up *en masse* against Israel’s brutal, decades-old regime of occupation, settler colonialism and apartheid.”¹²

Yet, the “popular resistance” that BDS stands in solidarity with is not non-violent. A terror wave of stabbings and shootings began in October 2015, in which individuals, often teenage Palestinians, have taken up weapons and randomly attacked Israelis in Jerusalem, and throughout Israel and the West Bank, and in recent months, escalated into bus bombings and mass shootings. The BDS Movement’s statement of solidarity with these actions is a call to arms in support of terrorism against innocent civilians. How unchristian could this be?

PCUSA support for the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation is ultimately the same as solidarity with radical militants in the West Bank and Gaza. The BDS Movement’s primary investors have, according to a former U.S. Department of the Treasury terrorist analyst, been the

same individuals who have funded Hamas, a US-designated terrorist organization that brutally controls the Gaza strip and is supported by Iran.¹³ Hamas' founding charter includes as one of its primary goals the destruction of the State of Israel. The extremism of BDS is reflected in the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC), which coordinates the movement globally. Mahmoud Nawajaa, the General Coordinator of the BNC, has publicly supported Hamas' armed wing – the Al Qassam Brigades – on social media.¹⁴ Its founder, Omar Barghouti describes the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation as its “most important strategic ally and partner in the U.S.”¹⁵

Opponents of this resolution will say this is restricting the freedom of association of Presbyterian Church members. But as a Church there are certain core values that must never be sacrificed. Among those is Jesus' teaching on the commandments. “This is the most important: ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.” As Paul says in Romans, true Christians must “love one another with mutual affection” and “outdo one another showing honor,” living in harmony with one another and living peaceably with all. Vengeance is to be left with God and enemies are to be blessed and helped in situations of need.” The Gospel of Matthew cautions us to “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?”

While all individuals remain free to choose whatever path they want in seeking justice, as a Church, we cannot, and will not stand for an approach that demonizes an entire people, and which delegitimizes the very existence of the Jewish homeland and glorifies violence against Israeli civilians. Jesus is a peacemaker, but his teaching distinguishes between those who give lip service to peace and those who really are “all in” for peace. As His followers, we have an obligation to align ourselves with those who truly work for peace for all, and not just some; with those who see the affliction of all people and not just some; with those who do not use violence and coercion; with those who promote tolerance and inclusion.

By ending our affiliation with the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, the Presbyterian Church (USA) will stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ in the United Methodist Church,¹⁶ which also took steps to commit itself to peacemaking, and affirming the right and duty of all people of all nations to determine their own destiny.¹⁷ In fellowship with the United Methodist Church, we will further strengthen the message against hatred that they prophetically expressed. Together, in collaboration, we can cease to be a divisive force on Israel-Palestine issues, but instead move forward in a way that would be productive, and promote a two state solution, respecting the rights of both peoples.

¹ See, <http://calms2016.umc.org/Text.aspx?mode=Petition&Number=198>, End Coalition Support.

² Omar Barghouti, speech at Ottawa University, March 4, 2009, <http://youtu.be/5oJRriJ2tY8>; reported later in the New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/01/opinion/global/zero-dark-zero.html?_r=0, and online in “The Electronic Intifada,” <http://electronicintifada.net/content/boycotts-work-interview-omar-barghouti/8263>

³ Ibid, note 2, “electronic intifada.”

⁴ <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2015/11/3/ipmn-concludes-annual-gathering-encouraged-continuing>.

⁵ The church has reaffirmed as recently as 2010, “Israel's right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders in accordance with United Nations resolutions,” http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/ga221-middle-east-faq.pdf; also see,

<https://www.pcusa.org/news/2014/6/27/zionism-unsettled-no-longer-sold-pcusa-website/>

⁶ As'ad AbuKahlil, "Critique of Norman Finkelstein on BDS," <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/4289>

⁷ Michael Warschawski, "YES to BDS an Answer," in Audrea Lim, Ed. *The Case for Sanctions Against Israel*, (London, 2012: Verso Press).

⁸ John Sprinkler, "Norman Finkelstein's Criticism of BDS: Wrong, but with a grain of truth," <http://newdemocracyworld.org/palestine/bds.html>, Feb, 2013.

⁹ Omar Barghouti, "Relative Humanity, the Essential Obstacle to a Just Peace in Palestine," *Counterpunch*, December 12-14, 2003, at

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2003/12/12/relative-humanity-the-essential-obstacle-to-a-just-peace-in-palestine/>

¹⁰ A definition of faction is useful. James Madison, writing in *Federalist 10*, described a faction as "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." Clinton Rossiter, Ed., *The Federalist Papers*, No. 10, pg. 78 (Penguin Books: New York, 1961).

¹¹ See the statement by IPMN Moderator Rev. Jeff DeYoe in 2014, "We have voted at the G.A. level to invest and to answer the BDS call. The semantics of whether or not we are part of a movement are irrelevant." <http://www.ecclesio.com/2014/09/after-the-hysteria-part-two-rev-dr-jeff-deyoe/>

¹² See,

<https://bdsmovement.net/2015/solidarity-with-the-palestinian-popular-resistance-boycott-israel-now-13313>

¹³ See, proceeding of the U.S. House of Representatives, Foreign Affairs Committee, April 19, 2016.

<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20160419/104817/HHRG-114-FA18-Wstate-SchanzerJ-20160419.pdf>

¹⁴ European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine, "International Conference of Local Governments and Civil Society Organizations in Support of Palestinian Rights," December 2, 2014, at

<http://www.eccpalestine.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Provprog-SEVILLE-with-names-1DEC2014.pdf>;

Mahmoud Nawajaa, Facebook Post, July 14, 2014, at

<https://www.facebook.com/mahmoud.nawajaa/posts/10152621485783185> (Above the post Nawajaa wrote "the Qassam style! Glory to resistance and eternity to martyrs.")

¹⁵ See, <http://endtheoccupation.org/article.php?id=3775>

¹⁶ Ibid, note 1.

¹⁷ United Methodist Church 2016 General Conference, "A Pathway for Peace in Palestine and Israel," <http://calms2016.umc.org/Text.aspx?mode=Petition&Number=205>.