

FAQ on Divestment

Talking Points-Short Version

The 221st General Assembly (2014) voted by a narrow margin to divest from three U.S. companies – Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard, and Motorola Solutions – whose products are used to further the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The assembly's vote was 310-303.

- These non-peaceful activities are inconsistent with the church's socially responsible investment policy.
 - Caterpillar provides bulldozers used in the destruction of Palestinian homes and for clearing land of fruit and olive tree groves.
 - Hewlett Packard provides electronic systems at checkpoints, logistics and communications systems to support the naval blockade of the Gaza Strip, as well as business relationships with illegal settlements in the West Bank.
 - Motorola Solutions provides military communications and surveillance systems in illegal Israeli settlements.
- The church's committee on socially responsible investing has been engaged with these companies for more than a decade urging change in these corporate activities with no results.
- This action is not divestment from Israel; the church has other significant investments in Israel.
- The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is explicit in:
 - Affirming the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders.
 - Advocating for the right of Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace, free from threats or acts of force.
 - Declaring that this action does not indicate alignment with the overall global Boycott, Divest and Sanctions (BDS) movement.
- Regarding *Zionism Unsettled*, the assembly declared that the publication does not represent the views of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- In the past year, the church has made positive investments in economic development in Palestine.
- The measure also reaffirms the PC(USA)'s commitment to interfaith dialogue and partnerships with the American Jewish and Muslim friends, and with Palestinian Christians.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

By slim margin, Assembly approves divestment from three companies doing business in Israel/Palestine

June 20, 2014

General Assembly News

BETHANY DAILY

With audible gasps from those in the plenary hall, the 221st General Assembly (2014) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on Friday narrowly approved divestment from three United States companies doing business in Israel-Palestine.

By a vote of 310-303, the Assembly approved an overture calling for divestment from Caterpillar Inc., Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions, companies some allege are engaged in “non-peaceful pursuits” in the region. A similar overture failed 333-331 at the 220th Assembly (2012).

Although divestment was its most debated item, the overture also affirms the PC(USA)’s commitment to interfaith and ecumenical dialogue and relationships in the region, and a preamble was added on the floor to reinforce that, saying, “The PC(USA) has a long-standing commitment to peace in Israel and Palestine. We recognize the complexity of the issues, the decades-long struggle, the pain suffered and inflicted by policies and practices of both the Israeli government and Palestinian entities. We further acknowledge and confess our own complicity in both the historic and current suffering of Israeli and Palestinian yearning for justice and reconciliation.”

Immediately after the vote, Moderator Heath Rada reaffirmed that, saying, “In no way is this a reflection for our lack of love for our Jewish sisters and brothers.”

The overture included amended language acknowledging the complexities of the conflict in Israel-Palestine, the PC(USA)’s longstanding commitment to peace in the region, the suffering of both Israelis and Palestinians and the church’s complicity in that suffering.

The Assembly committee on Middle East Issues, which recommended the overture for approval, feels it is a “compassionate and holistic approach to relationships in the Middle East,” said committee moderator Teaching Elder Commissioner Stephen Choi.

Many opposed to divestment cited damaged relationships with Jewish partners as a major concern.

“Divestment has the symbolic power to humiliate our Jewish friends in this country,” said Teaching Elder Commissioner Sid Batts from the Presbytery of Salem. Batts serves a church across the street from a Jewish temple and values the strong relationship between the two congregations.

But many Jews are in favor of divestment, said Ben Falter, young adult advisory delegate from the Presbytery of Geneva.

“Just as we here have differing views, so too do our Jewish brothers and sisters,” he said.

Others opposed to the overture were concerned its passage would mistakenly align the PC(USA) with the international boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. The overture was amended to read: “This action on divestment does not mean an alignment with the overall strategy of the global BDS (Boycott, Divest and Sanctions) movement.”

“We are already losing control of our message. Divestment will not end the conflict and bring peace. Divestment will bring dissension,” said Teaching Elder Commissioner Frank Allen from the Presbytery of Central Florida. “Dialogue and relationship building will lay the groundwork for real peace.”

Allen presented a minority report opposing divestment and encouraging the Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee to continue its corporate engagement process with the three companies. MRTI has been engaged with the three companies since 2004 and recommends divestment.

Andries Coetzee, a teaching elder commissioner from the Presbytery of Muskingum Valley, referenced the PC(USA)’s divestment from companies supporting apartheid in South Africa. As a member of the oppressive white minority in South Africa, Coetzee thanked his fellow Presbyterians for divesting there and encouraged the Assembly to do the same for Israelis and Palestinians.

“You put me on the road to gaining back my humanity,” Coetzee said.

Other items of business from the Middle East committee:

approval of an overture instructing the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to provide a history of General Assembly policies favoring a two-state solution in Israel-Palestine and to prepare a report to the 222nd Assembly (2016);

disapproval of an overture affirming the human rights of Israelis and Palestinians but calling Israel an apartheid state;

disapproval of an overture calling for the boycott of all Hewlett-Packard products;

an overture reaffirming the PC(USA)’s commitment to the human rights of all children, especially those in Israel/Palestine; and

an overture endorsing a paper written by the Ecumenical and Interreligious Work Group of the Presbytery of Chicago, “Perspectives on Presbyterian Church (USA) Support for a Just and Peaceful Compromise of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.” The paper was cited as a third-way solution, but many commissioners expressed concern that they didn’t receive the paper in time to read it.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Middle East Committee recommends divestment from Caterpillar, H-P and Motorola

June 17, 2014

General Assembly News

BETHANY DAILY

With a vote of 45-20, the Middle East Issues Committee of the 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is recommending that the denomination divest from Caterpillar, Inc.; Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions — companies some say are engaged in “non-peaceful pursuits” in Israel-Palestine.

The vote came after a day and a half of testimonies from interested parties, debate among committee members and parliamentary twists and turns.

“It is the right and ripe time for us to take a prophetic stance,” said David Thornton, a commissioner from the Presbytery of Pittsburgh. He was speaking in favor of divestment but noted that he also supports positive investment in the region.

Although the financial impact of the PC(USA) divesting would be minuscule for all three companies, the church has the opportunity to make a spiritual impact that could serve as a wake-up call, Thornton said.

The recommendation is to divest from corporations, but Jews in his community will feel personally attacked if the PC(USA) proceeds, said Kenneth Macari, a commissioner from the Presbytery of Elizabeth. If the Assembly approves the committee’s recommendation, Macari said he’ll be a vocal conscientious objector.

Many commissioners expressed concern that supporting divestment from the three companies would align the denomination with the international boycott, divestment and sanction movement, also known as BDS— a stance they did not support.

But Christine Dickerson, a commissioner from the Presbytery of Riverside, said “divestment has nothing to do with BDS or finances and has to do with human rights.”

Calling divestment the wrong solution to the conflict in Israel-Palestine, Robert Opie, a commissioner from the Presbytery of Stockton, recalled his experiences in the Vietnam War. As a platoon leader, he used a Caterpillar bulldozer to destroy cemeteries used as firing points; although he abhorred the actions he was directed to take, he did not hold Caterpillar at fault.

“We’re missing the target,” he said. “We should be aiming at changing the policy of the Israelis and not directing our concerns toward a particular company.”

The committee approved a Commissioners’ Resolution stating that Zionism Unsettled, a study guide produced by the PC(USA)’s Israel Palestine Mission Network, does not represent the views of the denomination.

Released in January, the study guide is available for sale in the PC(USA)’s online store and has been accused of being one-sided propaganda by some Jewish groups. Citing censorship concerns, the committee voted to not remove the guide from the store.

With a vote of 52-12, the committee disapproved an overture calling for the PC(USA) to boycott all Hewlett-Packard products “until the company ceases to profit from all non-peaceful pursuits in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the violation of Palestinian human rights.”

The committee also approved

an overture instructing the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to provide a history of General Assembly policies favoring a two-state solution in Israel-Palestine and to prepare a report to the 222nd Assembly (2016);
an overture condemning the recent attack by the Israeli military on Tent of Nations, a peace project in the West Bank, and encouraging Presbyterians to visit the project and pursue legal efforts at protecting and rebuilding it;
an overture calling on the Stated Clerk to call on the interfaith community and PC(USA) partners to pray for justice and peace in Israel-Palestine;

an overture reaffirming the PC(USA)’s commitment to the human rights of all children, especially those in Israel-Palestine; and

an overture endorsing a paper written by the Ecumenical and Interreligious Work Group of the Presbytery of Chicago, “Perspectives on Presbyterian Church (USA) Support for a Just and Peaceful Compromise of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.” Cited as a third-way solution, the paper had not been read by many of the commissioners.

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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

An Open Letter of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to our American Jewish Interfaith Partners

June 26, 2014

Louisville

We are reaching out to you after our General Assembly's action, by a 310-303 vote, to recommend to the Presbyterian Foundation and the Board of Pensions to divest from three North American corporations following extensive corporate engagement. The assembly concluded that further engagement would not bring an end to their pursuits that further the Israeli occupation in Palestine. Many of you were with us in Detroit, and your presence and voices were significant. From your presence with us, it was clear that if the assembly acted on divestment, it would deeply affect your communities as well as impact some of our most longstanding interfaith relationships. The assembly's action came about through much prayer and discernment.

Of central importance in our deliberations was our continued concern for Palestinians and Israelis to live in peace. How selective divestment may affect the many significant Jewish and Christian relationships at the congregational and national level was also part of the discussion. The close nature of the vote revealed how deeply Presbyterians care about both Jewish and Palestinian neighbors and the assembly's struggle to make this decision. The assembly explicitly stated that our action to selectively divest was not in support of the global BDS movement. Instead it is one of many examples of our commitment to ethical investing. We are pressed and challenged to follow our faith values and commitments in all times and in all areas of our lives. The occupation must end. All peoples in Israel and Palestine should live in security, freedom, and peace. This action is but one aspect of our commitment to work to this end.

The assembly was explicit: our selective divestment of American companies engaged in nonpeaceful pursuits that furthers the occupation does *not* constitute divestment from Israel itself.

Nor does this indicate any desire for the PC(USA) to walk away from our deeply held, multilateral Jewish-Christian relationships. The action included an affirmation of continued interfaith engagement with the Jewish community. We are committed more than ever to sitting at the table and living in community with you. The new Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) asks Presbyterians to approach interfaith relationships without bending and trimming their religious convictions but to hold them hand-in-hand with heartfelt listening and partnership with those of other religious traditions as part of our shared commitment for the common good.

We believe that being in relationship with the American Jewish communities in authentic ways are central to our Christian values and our shared religious history. We recognize the hurt that these decisions have caused. We ask that you remain open to us as we participate with you in all our shared spheres of interfaith relationship: our houses of worship, our shared neighborhoods, our workplaces, and even our interfaith families. As Presbyterians on the local level reach out to you, we ask that you receive and engage them and in doing so perhaps we will begin to heal this rift, neighbor-to-neighbor.

The full text of the 221st General Assembly (2014) is as follows:

“The PC(USA) has a longstanding commitment to peace in Israel and Palestine. We recognize the complexity of the issues, the decades-long struggle, the pain suffered and inflicted by policies and practices of both the

Israeli government and Palestinian entities. We further acknowledge and confess our own complicity in both the historic and current suffering of Israeli and Palestinian yearning for justice and reconciliation, the 221st General Assembly (2014) recommends the following:

- “1. Reaffirm Israel’s right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders in accordance with the United Nations resolutions.
- “2. Declare its commitment to a two-state solution in which a secure and universally recognized State of Israel lives alongside a free, viable, and secure state for the Palestinian people.
- “3. Instruct the Presbyterian Foundation and the Board of Pensions of the PC(USA), to divest from Caterpillar, Inc., Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions, in accord with our church’s decades-long socially responsible investment (SRI) history, and not to reinvest in these companies until the Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee of the PC(USA) is fully satisfied that product sales and services by these companies are no longer in conflict with our church investment policy. This action on divestment is not to be construed or represented by any organization of the PC(USA) as divestment from the State of Israel, or an alignment with or endorsement of the global BDS (Boycott, Divest and Sanctions) movement.
- “4. Reaffirm PC(USA)’s commitment to interfaith dialog and partnerships with the American Jewish, Muslim friends and Palestinian Christians and call for all presbyteries and congregations within the PC(USA) to include interfaith dialogue and relationship-building as part of their own engagement in working for a just peace.
- “5. Call for all foreign aid given by the U.S. government—including aid to Israel and the Palestinian Authority—to be comprehensively and transparently accounted to the American people and held to the same standards of compliance with all applicable laws.
- “6. Call for church advocacy for foreign-aid accountability to be directed toward its universal adherence rather than targeted for selective application to some recipients and not others.
- “7. Encourage Presbyterians to travel to the Holy Land, and give broad support to the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities throughout the Middle East.
- “8. Affirm the importance of economic measures and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians that support and advance a negotiated two-state solution.
- “9. Urge all church institutions to give careful consideration to possible investments in Israel-Palestine that advance peace and improve the lives of Palestinians and Israelis.”

Ruling Elder Heath K. Rada

Moderator, 221st General Assembly

The Reverend Grady Parsons

Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

Ruling Elder Linda Bryant Valentine

Executive Director, Presbyterian Mission Agency