

Israel & Divestment

The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) at first submitted, but now has withdrawn, legislation to divest the United Methodist Church from Caterpillar, Inc. because it sells equipment to Israel. GBCS alleges Caterpillar bulldozers support Israel's occupation of the Palestinians. . GBCS has announced it is in dialogue with Caterpillar, which has said it opposes any "immoral" use of its equipment.

Meanwhile, the Methodist Federation for Social Action and the New England Annual Conference, among others, have urged more sweeping divestment proposals aimed against Israel. GBCS, the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), and liberal caucus groups exclusively fault Israel for strife in the Middle East. They assume that increased U.S. pressure would force Israel to accommodate an independent Palestinian state.

In fact, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is more complicated than most United Methodist officials admit. Israel and the U.S. already support a Palestinian state. Most Palestinians now live directly under Palestinian rule. Israel continues to occupy parts of the West Bank to guarantee its own security. The majority political party among Palestinians, Hamas, remains publicly committed to Israel's destruction. The more "moderate" Palestinian political party, Fatah, continues to subsidize incendiary rhetoric against Israel through its media. And it still demands a "right of return" to Israel by the descendants of Arabs who left Israel in 1947, which would effectively end Israel as a Jewish state. Meanwhile, since Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, Hamas supporters there have continued to fire rockets into Israel.

Any meaningful peace between Israel and Palestinians requires a change of attitudes in the Middle East. Palestinians must abandon extremist groups like Hamas, accept Israel as a neighbor, and work for democracy and human rights. Arab governments likewise need to accommodate Israel's existence and urge moderation among the Palestinians. The genocidal threats against Israel by Iran's Islamist president must be renounced. Human rights, especially religious liberty, should be advocated throughout the Middle-East, where dwindling Christian minorities continue to suffer.

GBCS and other liberal church groups continue to be guided by dated forms of "liberation theology," which portrays Israel as the Western oppressor and the Palestinians as a Third World victim. This ideological prism is not helpful in advocating justice and peace for all. We are hopeful that this General Conference not only will reject anti-Israel divestment proposals but also renounce unfair biases against democratic Israel. The United Methodist Church should advocate human rights for all peoples everywhere. And we should give special attention to the victims of the world's most repressive regimes, especially those that persecute the church.