



## Palestinian civil society welcomes Presbyterian Church (USA) Israel boycott resolution

The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) is a wide coalition of the largest Palestinian mass organizations, trade unions, networks and organizations.

BNC member organizations:

Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine

Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)

Palestinian Nat'l Institute for NGOs

Global Palestine Right of Return Coalition

Palestinian Trade Union Coalition for BDS (PTUC-BDS)

Federation of Indep. Trade Unions

Gen. Union of Palestinian Workers

Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions

Gen. Union of Palestinian Women

Union of Palestinian Farmers

Gen. Union of Palestinian Teachers

Gen. Union of Palestinian Writers

Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUPE)

Union of Professional Associations

Gen. Union of Palestinian Peasants

Union of Public Employees in Palestine-Civil Sector

Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (STW)

Nat'l Committee for Grassroots Resistance

Pal. Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)

Nat'l Committee to Commemorate the Nakba

Civic Coalition for the Defense of Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem

Coalition for Jerusalem

Union of Pal. Charitable Organizations

Palestinian Economic Monitor

Union of Youth Activity Centers-Palestine Refugee Camps

Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Initiative

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*"There comes a time when silence becomes betrayal." --Rev Dr. Martin Luther King*

*Occupied Palestine, 7 July 2012* – The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC), the broadest coalition of Palestinian political parties, trade unions, NGOs and networks, warmly welcomes the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s resolute vote to boycott all products from Israeli colonial settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory and to call on all nations to "prohibit the import of products made by enterprises in Israeli settlements on Palestinian land." The strongly worded resolution also calls upon all countries to ban the import of such products until Palestinians are able to realize their rights and achieve independence.<sup>1</sup> This decision marks an important milestone in the march of mainline churches in the US towards holding Israel accountable for its occupation, violations of international law and denial of the Palestinian right to self-determination.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has taken a decisive step towards ending all forms of complicity with Israel's three-tiered system of occupation, colonization and apartheid following from its consistent support for Palestinian rights.

The resolution, voted upon at the 220<sup>th</sup> PC (USA) General Assembly (30 June – 7 July 2012) in Pittsburgh PA, gathering representatives of the two million strong Presbyterian faithful in the US, makes particular mention of two Israeli companies, Ahava Cosmetics and Hadiklaim (Israel Date Growers Cooperative Ltd.), target of successful boycott campaigns around the world as part of the global BDS movement.<sup>2</sup> Both Ahava and Hadiklaim operate from settlements in the occupied West Bank and profit from the illegal exploitation of natural resources there.

This vote brings the Presbyterian Church (USA) closer to the demands of the 2005 Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Call that calls for ending Israel's impunity for its serious violations of international law. BDS is endorsed by an overwhelming majority of Palestinians, including representatives of Palestinian church groups from all major Christian denominations.<sup>3</sup> In 2009, prominent Palestinian Christians issued the "Kairos Palestine" document<sup>4</sup>, a

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=3775>

<sup>2</sup> <http://stolenbeauty.org/> and <http://www.bigcampaign.org/current-campaigns/boycott-israeli-dates/>

<sup>3</sup> Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6d9\\_jiG\\_jWs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6d9_jiG_jWs)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/>

historic theological manifesto that seeks inspiration from a similar document issued in 1985 by South African theologians, detailing their vision for justice and the obligation to resist injustice. Kairos Palestine explicitly advocates BDS against Israel until it meets its obligations under international law.<sup>5</sup>

A separate vote to divest the church's funds from three major American corporations - Caterpillar, Motorola and Hewlett Packard<sup>6</sup> - due to their complicity in Israel's protracted occupation and serious violations of international law, fell by a margin of only two votes. The resolution was brought to the plenary at the recommendation of the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI), the body responsible for the church's socially responsible investments.<sup>7</sup> It enjoyed strong support from most official church entities including the Board of Pensions, the Advisory Committee on Racial & Ethnic Concerns, the General Assembly Mission Council and from Young Adult Advisory Delegates. The latter serves as a strong indicator of where the church will be heading in the future. This virtual consensus from within the church's leadership in favor of divestment was formed gradually, following a process of engagement initiated in 2004 with select corporations known to provide support, technology, and military equipment that sustain Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. Following years of fruitless dialogue with these corporations<sup>8</sup>, the MRTI recommended abandoning the process of engagement with the three identified companies and move towards a policy of divestment.<sup>9</sup> It is expected that the policy of divestment from Israel will continue to be pursued from within the church in coming years, making this an important vehicle for much needed grassroots debate about the United State's role in sustaining Israel's protracted occupation, colonization and apartheid.

The BNC emphasizes that the PC (USA) General Assembly's decision to invest in Palestinian businesses is not a substitute for divestment from corporations that harm Palestinians. Whether or not the Presbyterian Church invests in Palestinian business, its continued investment in corporations that are persistently implicated in gross violations of international law and human rights contradicts the Church's moral obligation to do not harm.

Caterpillar, one of the divestment-shortlisted companies, was only days ago delisted from the influential MSCI (Morgan Stanley Capital International) World Socially Responsible Index, with its role in supplying Israel with bulldozers used to wantonly destroy Palestinian property cited as a reason.<sup>10</sup> This triggered the US pension fund TIAA-CREF, also target of a high profile divestment campaign in the US led by Jewish Voice for Peace in partnership with the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, the American Friends Service Committee, Adalah-NY, among others<sup>11</sup>, to remove Caterpillar from its Social Choice Funds portfolio, in effect divesting millions of dollars worth of shares from the company. In May, Quaker Friends Fiduciary Corporation (FFC), which holds over \$200 million in assets, had too taken the decision to divest from Caterpillar.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bdsmovement.net/call#.T5pJwMR-url>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.whoprofits.org/HP>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=225](http://www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/main/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=225)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2012/4/25/mrti-holds-long-sought-meeting-caterpillar/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2011/9/12/mrti-reports-engagement-companies-doing-business-i/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/06/msci-statement-on-caterpillar-key-factor-in-the-downgrade-was-on-going-controversy-associated-with-use-of-the-companys-equipment-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territories.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://wedivest.org/>

As Palestinians, we are inspired by the impressive mass mobilization brought by this resolution and the spirit of genuine international solidarity demonstrated by those who have tirelessly worked to stand up firmly behind the full set of Palestinian human rights, which include also full equality for Palestinians citizens of Israel, and the right of return of Palestinian refugees as guaranteed by international law.<sup>12</sup> Activists from all backgrounds, including renowned musician Roger Waters<sup>13</sup>, Jewish activists led by Jewish Voice for Peace and those affiliated with the US Campaign to End the Occupation, the Presbyterian Israel Palestine Mission Network (IPMN) and CODEPINK, spoke vocally in favor of ending church material support to Israel's occupation and stood dignified to the opposition's – coming mostly from outside the Presbyterian Church (USA) - straw man's arguments. In this regard, the deliberate and desperate resort to smearing distortions and fear mongering to justify Israel's crimes by Israel lobbyists and apologists is continuing to have the opposite effect of exposing the true nature of Israel's oppression of Palestinians to the wider public.

We salute the Presbyterian Church (USA) for its decisive steps towards ending forms of direct complicity in Israel's oppression of Palestinians. We look forward to working with allies in returning the Church to the same moral leadership that was so crucial in ending other forms of injustice in the past, primary among which is the church's support for the struggle against apartheid in South Africa—a key inspiration for the Palestinian-led BDS movement today.

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<sup>12</sup> See for example <http://www.rabbisletter.org/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/opinion/perspectives/divest-in-israel-presbyterians-should-support-palestinian-aspirations-642882/>