

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

April 21, 2010

Report of the Divestment Task Force New England Conference of the United Methodist Church

SUMMARY

Since the last report of the Divestment Task Force in 2007, the panel has continued its research into companies supporting the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. In February 2010, one of its members traveled to the occupied territories with a United Methodist study group to document the involvement of various companies with the occupation. As a result of this research and in accordance with its mandate, the task force has issued a list of nine additional companies which are helping sustain the Israeli occupation.

The occupation continues, as more Palestinian land is confiscated for illegal settlements built outside Israel's internationally recognized borders. More than 500,000 Israelis now live on occupied land in the West Bank in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. As this report was being prepared, the Israeli government announced the building of 1600 new settlement homes in the West Bank near East Jerusalem. A November 3, 2009 report in the online edition of the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz stated that 50,000 new housing units in [occupied] East Jerusalem are in various stages of planning and approval. The United States and other countries around the world have expressed their opposition to these developments.

The task force has prepared educational materials to describe what is happening in the Holy Land today and can provide speakers to address the role that companies play in sustaining the deepening occupation. To request a speaker or to ask questions about this report, please contact task force chairman William P. Aldrich at wpaldrich@cox.net.

BACKGROUND

The Divestment Task Force was created to implement Resolution 204, which was passed by the 2005 New England Annual Conference ("Resolution on Divesting from Companies that are Supporting in a Significant Way the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian Territories"). The task force was charged with identifying and maintaining a list of companies that meet this criterion. Eleven clergy and lay members from four of the five states in the conference currently serve on this panel. A number of them have visited the occupied territories and have seen the effects of the occupation first-hand.

Several points are important:

- The resolution does not call for divestment from Israel, but from companies supporting the occupation;
- Its recommendations are not binding, but provide information to help United Methodist churches, members and investment managers in the New England Conference make voluntary divestment decisions; and
- Divestment as a tool to end the occupation is supported by the World Council of Churches as well as a number of Israeli and international Jewish organizations.

The committee's ongoing process is to write to companies that appear to be supporting the occupation according to the established criteria, and request a response within 60 days. Where possible the companies are engaged in dialogue. If the task force's research is not disproved and the company does not indicate an intent to end its involvement, then its name is placed on the divestment list.

INITIAL REPORT

In June, 2007 the Conference issued a press release announcing that the task force had identified twenty companies that provided support to the occupation by (1) maintaining a presence on occupied land, (2) providing materials or systems for the occupation infrastructure, or (3) providing support for Israeli military operations against Palestinians on occupied land. The report contents, supporting documents, and other resources and information are available on the Conference web site at www.neumc.org/divest.

CURRENT WORK

Since the initial report was publicized, the task force has continued its work of identifying companies, writing letters to them, engaging in a dialogue at times, and deciding which ones meet the criteria to be added to the list. Simultaneously, companies already on the list have been reviewed with the intent of removing any that no longer meet the criteria. ,*To date, none of the companies on the list have ended their involvement with the occupation. Thus, the original 20 companies remain on the list.

As of April 2010, nine more companies are being added to the list. A summary describing each company's involvement is provided below, along with the data used to produce those summaries. The updates are available on the conference web site at www.neumc.org/divest.

In addition to those companies, two others involved in the occupation that were candidates for the list, Unilever and Assa Abloy, have announced plans to end their involvement, and their progress is being monitored. Letters to additional companies are outstanding.

The task force research has been recognized nationally and internationally by people and organizations who are seeking an end to the occupation. Task force members are also working with groups in other countries, including Israel, to build a shared base of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Selective divestment is consistent with the United Methodist commitment to a just and sustainable peace for all the people of the Middle East. In 2004 the worldwide General Conference of the United Methodist Church passed Resolution 312 calling for an end to the Israeli occupation. The Divestment Task Force supports that resolution and offers a tangible way of working toward this goal.

Respectfully submitted,
William P. Aldrich, Chair
Divestment Task Force