



**The United Church of Christ,
General Synod 30, and Israel/Palestine**
*What Synod Said, and What It Didn't—
A Summary Guide for UCC Clergy and Members*
July, 2015

The 30th General Synod of the United Church of Christ met from June 26-30 in Cleveland, Ohio. In addition to a variety of significant business on its own structure, race issues in the US (mass incarceration and the Washington, DC football team name), and global issues (unification of Korea and the Armenian Genocide), Synod also addressed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On Israel/Palestine, the General Synod **adopted** a resolution entitled, “A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.” The vote was 508 in favor, 124 opposed, and 38 abstentions (80.4% in favor, counting those who voted for or against; 75.8% in favor, counting all delegates).

This resolution calls upon the UCC to:

- A. Study the [Kairos Palestine document](#) as well as other perspectives on the occupied Palestinian territories
- B. Divest from companies that profit from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and people
- C. Boycott products made by companies that operate in illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories
- D. Advocate with Congress to ensure Israel’s compliance with US laws, related to the \$3.1 billion of military aid that the US sends annually to Israel, and in light of Israeli human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories
- E. Continue to engage in interfaith dialogue, including with Jewish colleagues and organizations.

This resolution does **not** call for boycott or divestment from Israel. There is an important distinction between that and what the resolution calls for. The resolution addresses the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and its people; it does not challenge Israel’s existence.

This resolution is an endorsement of the spirit of the Palestinian BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) Movement, but only addresses one of the BDS Movement’s calls—the end to occupation. The BDS Movement is a Palestinian civil society movement that was launched in 2005 and supports employing these tactics to bring about an end to the occupation, as well as two additional calls, which the UCC’s General Synod resolution does not address: “recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.”

The resolution seeks to employ a non-violent tactic to bring an end to the occupation, in response to the authentic and clear call of Palestinian Christian partners, especially as articulated in the *Kairos Palestine* document (2009). The UCC has consistently condemned violence in all of its forms, not only in the Middle East. This approach is consistent with that understanding of ideal human relations.

The resolution focuses on Israeli policies; it does not seek to provoke or alienate our Jewish partners and friends. It does hope to stimulate dialogue on the realities of occupation and on the conflict as a whole, recognizing that the UCC has close ties of partnership and relationship with Palestinian Christians and their institutions, as well as other partners in Israel/Palestine, and that many Jewish colleagues have close ties with Israeli Jews and institutions in Israel (but not as many opportunities for encountering the occupation).

The UCC, through General Synod, has an extensive corpus of General Synod policy on Israel/Palestine dating back to 1967, and a very long history of engagement on the Middle East, as well as global justice issues

throughout the world and over the course of our history, including the Congo, South Africa, the Philippines, Colombia, among other places.

Our engagement in the Middle East is part of the global witness, and our relationships with partners in the Middle East involves solidarity, advocacy, support of vital ministries of presence and witness (including refugee response, community development, conflict resolution, justice and peacemaking, education at many levels, health and wholeness, interfaith dialogue, and Christian presence). The UCC's General Synod positions in Israel/Palestine focus primarily on the situation of Palestinians living under occupation, seeking to end the occupation and various aspects of it. Taken as a whole, these positions characterize the uneven conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as:

- ❖ a conflict over land, control of resources, and political power, between two peoples: the Israelis and the Palestinians—Jews, Christians, and Muslims;
- ❖ a conflict that dates back into the first half of the twentieth century;
- ❖ a conflict that requires a negotiated political solution that addresses the main concerns such as security, boundaries, settlements, refugees, Jerusalem, resources (including water), and demographics and citizenship rights.
- ❖ It is not understood as a millennia-old civilizational conflict, or even as Jewish-Muslim; Palestinian Christians experience the same effects of occupation as their Muslim neighbors.

In previous years, the General Synod has adopted resolutions on the use of economic leverage, such as boycotts of Taco Bell and others related to the Immokalee tomato pickers movement for fair wages; boycotts of Mt. Olive pickles, also related to justice for the workers; and calls for corporate engagement and divestment from Apartheid-era South Africa.

General Synod 30 also considered, but **defeated**, a resolution that would have called upon the United Church of Christ to “recognize the actions of Israel against the Palestinians as *apartheid*,” according to the 2002 International Criminal Court definition. The vote was 312 in favor, 295 opposed, and 31 abstentions (51.4% in favor, counting those who voted for or against; 48.9% in favor, counting all delegates). The resolution again focused on the occupation and Israeli policies in the West Bank and around Gaza. It did **not** seek to name Israel an apartheid state. While more delegates supported the resolution than opposed it, it did not obtain the required 2/3 majority to pass.

Selected resources for further study:

Kairos Palestine—A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering, http://www.globalministries.org/palestinian_christian_kairos.

Recommended reading on Israel/Palestine, http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/globalministries/legacy_url/5638/Books-Israel-Palestine.pdf?1419967449

UCC General Synod 30 Resolution on Israel/Palestine, <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/GS30-A-CALL-FOR-THE-UNITED-CHURCH-OF-CHRIST-TO-TAKE-ACTIONS-TOWARD-A-JUST-PEACE-IN-THE-ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN-CONFLICT.pdf>

Past UCC General Synod resolutions on Israel/Palestine, http://www.globalministries.org/israel_palestine_resolutions

This summary is prepared to assist clergy, members, and others in understanding and interpreting the actions of the 30th General Synod. For more substantive discussion, please contact Dr. Peter Makari, Executive, Middle East and Europe, Wider Church Ministries, UCC, in the National Setting of the UCC in Cleveland, OH. He can be reached at (216) 736-3227, and by e-mail at makarip@ucc.org.