

Frequently Asked Questions: Middle East Issues

What is the overall issue?

Honoring self-determination and human rights, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s General Assembly has long supported two viable states as a solution for the Israel Palestine conflict. The challenge has been how to respond to the human rights violations and suffering occurring as a result of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The church's policy based on General Assembly actions include:

- promoting a just peace in the Middle East;
- acting in solidarity with Palestinian Christian mission partners and other church partners across the Middle East;
- ending the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza; and
- advocating for the right for Israelis and Palestinians "to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force."

What actions have been considered by past General Assemblies?

Divestment was first considered at the 2004 General Assembly (GA), which instructed the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) to begin a process of "phased, selective divestment" related to corporations doing business in Israel. Since 2004, GAs have directed MRTI to use the church's customary corporate engagement process to ensure that church investments are made only in companies engaged in peaceful pursuits in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

In 2012, the GA approved a **boycott** of all Israeli products produced illegally in the Palestinian Territories. This is not a cultural or academic boycott, or a boycott against any product made in Israel. Instead, it is a call to recognize that factories in illegal settlements prevent a just peace between Israel and Palestine.

The 2012 GA also directed the Presbyterian Foundation and the Presbyterian Mission Agency to begin **positive investments** in Palestinian businesses to make a difference in the lives of those who are most vulnerable, to help in the development of viable infrastructure for a future Palestinian state, and to aid in job creation and economic development, while preserving an effective witness to peace in the region. Those investments have begun.

Who is Mission Responsibility Through Investment?

Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) is a committee of the General Assembly that implements General Assembly policies on socially responsible investing by engaging corporations in which the church owns stock.

What are their recommendations for the 2014 General Assembly?

MRTI has found three corporations — Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard and Motorola Solutions — not in compliance with GA of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) policy on socially responsible investing. MRTI has attempted to engage in dialogue to reach resolutions in line with these three corporations unsuccessfully. They will recommend to the 221st GA this summer in Detroit that these corporations be added to the denomination's divestment list until such a time as their corporate activities are found in accordance with policy. ([See full report and recommendations.](#))

Why is MRTI focusing on these three corporations?

Complete details are available in the [MRTI report](#), but the General Assembly developed criteria for corporate engagement on this topic, which called for corporations to confine their business activity solely to peaceful pursuits, and refrain from allowing their products or services to support or facilitate violent acts by Israelis or Palestinians against innocent civilians, construction and maintenance of settlements or Israeli-only roads in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory, and construction of the Separation Barrier as it extends beyond the 1967 “Green Line” into Palestinian territories.”. MRTI has found these companies to be out of compliance with these criteria, as well as resistant to change and further dialogue:

- **Caterpillar** provides the bulldozers that are militarized and used in the destruction of Palestinian homes, clearing land of structures and fruit and olive tree groves, and in preparation for the construction of the barrier wall.
- **Hewlett-Packard** has extensive involvement with the Israeli army and provides electronic systems at checkpoints, logistics and communications systems to support the naval blockade of the Gaza Strip, and has business relationships with illegal settlements in the West Bank.
- **Motorola Solutions** provides military communications and surveillance systems in the illegal Israeli settlements.

What is the point of divestment?

Presbyterians individually, and collectively, are responsible for their investments. Financial return isn't the only aim, but rather investment also serves to form a constructive partnership for good in the world that God has created. Divestment is always last resort, as a matter of faithful stewardship, when it becomes apparent that an investment can no longer be part of a constructive partnership for good. Divestment allows investors to ensure that their investments are in alignment with their values.

What GA committee will handle this business?

Committee 4: Middle East Issues. It is being led by Moderator Stephen Choi (Newton Presbytery) and Vice Moderator Virginia Sheets (Whitewater Valley Presbytery).

What business is before the 221st General Assembly related to Middle East issues?

- [04-01] On Reviewing General Assembly Policy Regarding the Two-State Solution in Israel Palestine—From the Presbytery of San Francisco.
- [04-02] On Divestment from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions—From the Presbytery of San Francisco.
- [04-03] On Engaging Presbyterian to Witness for Palestinian Human Rights and for Ending the Occupation of Palestine—From the Presbytery of Grace.
- [04-04] On Supporting Middle East Peacemaking—From the Presbytery of New Covenant.
- [04-05] On Calling for a Boycott of All Hewlett-Packard Products—From the Presbytery of New Brunswick.
- [04-06] On Affirming Occupation-Free Investment in Palestine—From the Presbytery of Mackinac.
- [04-07] On Adopting the Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) Recommendation on Divestment—From the Synod of the Covenant.
- [04-08] Mission Responsibility Through Investment: Engagement with Corporations on Israel-Palestine Issues from 2004–2013—PMA

[04-09] Resolution on Equal Rights for All Inhabitants of Israel and Palestine and on Conversations with Prophetic Voices
Details are available on [PC-Biz](#)

What is the position of the church on Israel and Palestine?

In 2010, the General Assembly reaffirmed its historical commitments with respect to the region and called for:

- an immediate cessation of all violence, whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians;
- the reaffirmation of Israel's right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders in accordance with United Nations resolutions;
- the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and diversion of water resources;
- an immediate freeze both on the establishment or expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and on the Israeli acquisition of Palestinian land and buildings in East Jerusalem;
- the relocation by Israel of the Separation Barrier to the 1967 border;
- the withholding of US government aid to the State of Israel as long as Israel persists in creating new West Bank settlements;
- continuing corporate engagement through the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment with companies profiting from the sale and use of their products for nonpeaceful purposes and/or the violation of human rights;
- a shared status for Jerusalem;
- equal rights for Palestinian citizens of the State of Israel;
- the cessation of systematic violations of human rights by any party specifically, practices of administrative detention, collective punishment, the torture of prisoners and suspects, home demolitions and evictions, and the deportation of dissidents;
- the immediate resumption by Israel and Palestine of negotiations toward a two-state solution.

What actions can the 221st General Assembly take?

The assembly must "answer" each item of business using one of five options: approve, disapprove, refer, approve as amended, or answer with a different action than was originally proposed.

What have other denominations done on the issue of divestment?

A snapshot of information:

- **World Council of Churches**
In 2005, the World Council of Churches passed a resolution commending the selective divestment resolution passed by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 2004 saying that the previous resolution "in both method and manner, uses criteria rooted in faith and calls members to do the things that make for peace."
- **United Church of Christ**
The United Church of Christ endorsed a range of economic leverages that included divestment, but church leaders did not commit their pension or foundation assets to a divestment plan.
- **United Methodist Church**

- In 2012, the United Methodist Church voted to reject the divestment initiative regarding businesses that deal with Israel, including "Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions and Hewlett-Packard."
- **Episcopal Church**
In 2012, the Episcopal Church adopted a resolution at its General Convention Assembly that supported "a negotiated two-state solution" and "positive investment" rather than divestment from Israel.
 - **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** [updated 6/5/14]
In an action which underscored the call for economic initiatives with respect to Israel and Palestine that included the possibilities of 1) purchasing products from Palestinian providers and 2) exploration of the feasibility of refusing to buy products produced in Israeli settlements, the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to exclude the option of divestiture in the context of the church's exploration of its investment activities.
 - **Church of England**
The General Synod has vote for disinvestment from Israel.
 - **United Church of Canada** [updated 5/27/14]
The 41st General Council in August 2012 called on United Church members to take concrete actions to support the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Those actions include worship, prayer, and study; economic action focused on settlement goods; and support for trust-building programs between Palestinians and Israelis.

What is the position of the church on anti-Semitism?

"We condemn anti-Semitism in the strongest terms. While reaffirming our close spiritual ties with the Jewish people, we wish to state unequivocally that authentic Christianity can have no complicity in anti-Semitic attitudes or actions." (1990)

What is the position of the church on Zionism?

The General Assembly has not taken a position explicitly in regard to Zionism. The church has reaffirmed as recently as 2010, "Israel's right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders in accordance with United Nations resolutions," but it has also voted to "challenge and encourage discussion of theological interpretations that confuse biblical prophecies and affirmations of covenant, promise, and land, which are predicated on justice, righteousness, and mercy, with political statehood that asserts itself through military might, repressive discrimination, abuse of human rights, and other actions that do not reveal a will to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God," in its 2003 paper "End the Occupation Now."