

THE PRINCIPLED USE OF BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, AND SANCTIONS

Note: In 2010, as we approached the General Assembly in Minneapolis, the PPF National Committee went through a four-month long discernment and writing process to articulate the principles that would guide our growing commitment to take action to help bring about peace, justice, and genuine security in Israel and Palestine. Those principles have stood the test of time and have provided the bedrock upon which we have built our actions over the last four years.

As the 2014 General Assembly approached, PPF felt the need to reaffirm those principles, clarify the values we strive to uphold as we do this work, and call for respectful “rules of engagement” with Presbyterians and others with whom we disagree about these challenging matters.

The following is written to clarify our own position as an organization both for our members and supporters as well as those who look to our organization for guidance.

We strive to be consistent in our critique of those who use violence to resolve conflict.

We believe that we are called to be consistent and fair in our critique of governments, nation states, political parties and any other organizations that employ strategies of violence and war. For example, though we are a small organization with extremely limited capacity, we have been vociferous in our condemnation of our own government in the U.S. for its use of militarism as a response to the threat it has felt following the attacks of 9/11/01. Further, we have accompanied the Colombian Presbyterian Church in its condemnation of guerilla forces, paramilitary, and Colombian military when they have used strategies of war or acts of terrorism. Our critique of the State of Israel’s occupation of Palestine stands firmly in that tradition.

We choose to err on the side of nonviolent direct action rather than passive inaction cloaked in the language of moderation.

Though we are constantly examining our own complicity in promoting misunderstanding, we will continue to err on the side of nonviolent direct action – including BDS – to create the conditions needed to bring about an end to violence. We note that the Presbyterian Church (USA) became a focal point in the debate about Israel and Palestine in 2004 – after successive assemblies in which we made pronouncements about our concern for peace – when we began taking action to reform our own investment strategies.

We are committed to examine our own theological, cultural and political assumptions.

Theologically, we believe that it is always appropriate to examine our own fundamental assumptions. This is what it means to us to be “reformed and always being reformed.” Our commitment is to “remove the log from our own eye before being concerned with the speck in the eye of a sister or brother.” For this reason, it is reasonable for us to examine the role that Christian Zionism has played in creating the unsustainable dynamics of the occupation of Palestine by the State of Israel. Our primary concern here is to examine our own complicity as Christians – not to condemn others for their own. Similarly, we feel compelled as citizens of the United States to question our own government’s role – both positive and negative – in situations of violence and conflict around the world and in our own communities.

Our concerns about the prospects for peace and an end to the occupation:

Following the recent trip to Israel and Palestine that was sponsored by the PPF, we want to share the insights that have shaped our position with regard to our work to seek peace, genuine security and justice in Israel and Palestine.

“The Ongoing Nakba”

Nakba' is the Arabic word meaning 'the catastrophe,' historically used by Palestinians to describe the events that took place following the passage of UN General Assembly Resolution 181 in 1947 approving the partition of the land. This action led to an Arab-Israeli war, causing the dislocation of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes. The State of Israel was created by declaration in May 1948 and armistice agreements were signed with the Arab countries in 1949. Today, Palestinians are clear that the word Nakba must be used not only to describe that historical event, but to describe the intentional policies that have continued to separate Palestinians from their homes and their homeland even in the current moment.

Continued settlement expansion

The PPF was slow to embrace the BDS movement. During the General Assembly of 2010 in Minneapolis, we respected the work of the Israel Palestine Committee to create a compromise that would allow for a more moderate strategy as a denomination, and heeded the committee's call to back away from divestment from companies that were benefiting from or supporting the occupation of Palestine. When we did so, we were clear that the only objective way to judge the success of such a strategy would be to determine whether the settlement expansion would slow, stop, or be reversed. None of those things has happened in the past four years.

Since the Oslo Accords in the early nineties, the expansion of settlements has continued and accelerated, not even pausing during peace negotiations. Our judgment is that the State of Israel has shown little interest in reversing settlement expansion and ending the occupation, nor will it until it is clear that there will be a high cost to their international reputation if they choose to maintain these strategies.

In 2010 we published a document entitled "The beliefs and commitments that are the basis for our response to Israel and Palestine." We reaffirm our statements made at the time; except for the statement made agreeing with the position of the PCUSA on a two-state solution. We noted then and reiterate now, that the possibility of a two-state solution diminishes with each new Israeli settlement, road, political imprisonment, travel restriction and military checkpoint experienced by the Palestinian people. The possibility continues to diminish and leads us now to support the proposed overture asking the GA to initiate a study ending in a report to the 222nd GA that would make a recommendation regarding whether the church should continue to support the two-state solution or adopt a more neutral stance on this issue.

We will stand against any attempt we see to employ BDS as a tool of Anti-Semitism

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions are specific strategies rightly employed to end the destructive policies of the State of Israel that have been so devastating for the Palestinian people (and in our judgment, for Christians and Jews everywhere whose core religious convictions are compromised by these strategies as well).

Even as we embrace the call of Palestinians and a growing number of Jews in Israel and the United States to use BDS as a nonviolent strategy to help reform the State of Israel's immoral policies, we restate our

commitment to stand against any corruption of those strategies that could employ them to further anti-Jewish sentiment or violence anywhere in the world.

The Use of Terrorist acts – which we define as any overt or covert act of violence directed at a civilian population

We call on Palestinian leaders to do everything within their power to end the use of violence directed at civilians (or non-civilians, for that matter) by extremists who appear to want the conflict to continue. If there are ways within our power to do so, we will seek to apply pressure on those leaders just as we are committed to use principled strategies of BDS to pressure the State of Israel to end the occupation.

We believe that if we expect Palestinians to reject violence as a way to end the Occupation, we must respond to their call to take direct action through the principled use of BDS.

We will seek to actively respond to Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

We are committed to stand against any instances we see of both Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, especially where we as Presbyterians may have the ability to exert influence in the United States and around the world.