

# Questions and Answers about Divestment

## **Q. Why are you recommending divestment?**

**A.** Divestment is a form of nonviolent moral action to change unjust practices. It is a longstanding practice used by the Methodist Church for decades to counter human rights abuses around the world.

For years, our churches have said we oppose Israel's occupation. Selective divestment is a way to make sure our church funds are not being invested in companies that profit from the occupation.

## **Q. Is the New England Conference alone in this initiative?**

**A.** Not at all. There are a number of other annual conferences within the United Methodist Church and in other denominations that have adopted some form of divestment resolution. The World Council of Churches has called for divestment from companies that profit from the occupation. There are divestment campaigns under way in many colleges and universities. Public employee unions, banks, municipalities and other entities around the world are also committing to divestment from companies that support the occupation.

## **Q. Why Israel? Why not focus on China or other countries that have terrible records on human rights? What about Russia in Chechnya?**

**A.** *First*, because our tax dollars and investment dollars are paying for this. Israel is the largest recipient of US foreign aid. Americans are making money on Israel's occupation. We cannot criticize other countries as long as we are paying for the persecution and dispossession of Palestinians.

*Second*, because Israel's actions endanger Christians in the cradle of our faith, and as members of the Body of Christ, we have an obligation to defend them. We also advocate for all who are persecuted.

And *third*, because Israel's blatant violations of human rights are fueling terrorism and anti-American hatred around the world. For years, the US has vetoed efforts by the United Nations to end this conflict. We are seen as the reason this conflict continues.

## **Q. Won't divestment harm Israel's economy?**

**A.** No. It is not directed at Israeli companies in general, or at companies that do business in Israel, unless they profit from the occupation.

There are many kinds of divestment. The one chosen by the New England Methodist Conference focuses only on those companies that make money from the illegal occupation of Palestinian land. Most of the companies chosen are American and international companies. Only one at present is an Israeli company, and it was included because it profits from the occupation and is traded on an American stock exchange, making it a more likely choice for New England Methodist portfolios.

Actually, the occupation endangers Israelis, and whatever we can do to end it will provide Israelis a more secure and prosperous future.

**Q. How is the occupation harming Israel?**

A. In Israel, the expense of wars and military occupation is draining the Israeli economy and having a negative effect on its society as a whole. Today, 1.6 million Israelis live in poverty. Beginning in 1998, the US contributions to Israel's domestic economy have declined as its military contributions have increased. This year for the first time, all US aid for Israel goes to its military, while domestic programs suffer.

**Q. Churches should not take sides in this conflict.**

Divestment is not anti-Israel or pro-Palestinian. It is directed at companies that support and benefit from the ongoing conflict. Divestment is taking the side of a just and sustainable peace for all.

Through the enormous flow of US dollars to Israel's military, and through investments in companies profiting from occupation, we *have* actually been taking sides. Divestment is an effort to stop being one-sided in our practices.

The occupation endangers Israelis as well as Palestinians, and we are responding to pleas from many Israeli and Jewish organizations around the world to help end it.

**Q. Won't the church's divestment action destroy relationships between Methodists and Jews?**

A. The Methodist Church has long valued and nurtured relationships with Jews around the world. The divestment action is supported by many Jewish organizations. It is aimed not at Israel or companies that do business there, but at companies that profit from the occupation, which is doing great damage to Israel.

**Q. How do you respond to allegations of anti-Semitism which are often directed toward those that criticize Israel's actions?**

Again, divestment is not anti-Israel or pro-Palestinian. The occupation endangers Israelis as well as Palestinians, and we are responding to pleas from many Israeli

and Jewish organizations around the world to help end this conflict. A list of statements from Jewish groups supporting divestment is posted on our web site.

**Q. What about the Qassam rockets that Palestinians continue to fire into Israel? Doesn't Israel have a right to defend itself?**

We have said repeatedly that we deplore all violence against civilians, including the Qassam rockets. They endanger both Israelis and Palestinians, and damage the cause of peace. Each life is sacred, whether Israeli or Palestinian, and no action that targets innocent civilians can be tolerated. We are not aware of any investments by Methodists in companies that supply the Palestinians with armaments. We believe our task is to be sure we are not profiting from investments that contribute to the conflict.

**Q. What do you hope to accomplish through divestment?**

**A.** Divestment can do many things:

- (1) It can raise the level of awareness about how profitable Israel's occupation has become for companies around the world.
- (2) It can ensure that we as investors are not profiting from this.
- (3) It can put companies on notice that their support for Israel's occupation may turn away investors.
- (4) It can stimulate public discussion about the realities of occupation, which have largely been hidden from Americans, and can lay the groundwork for changing US policy.
- (5) It can provide hope to Palestinians who see their freedom denied every day.
- (6) It can show the world that we believe in the equality of all God's children, and that our faith requires our commitment to justice and peace.