

Process of the Divestment Task Force

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”...Full text attached). The task force includes eight clergy and lay members representing four of the five states in the conference.

It is important to note that the resolution does not call for divestment from Israel. Many companies that profit from the Israeli occupation are American and international firms. Selective divestment as a tool to end the occupation is supported by the World Council of Churches and a number of Israeli and international Jewish organizations.

Initial Research and Contacts. Over the past two years, we have examined many companies to determine which ones support the Israeli occupation. Our research has been commended by people around the world who are seeking an end to the occupation. We are also working with groups in other countries to build a shared base of knowledge.

After gathering evidence, we sent a letter to each company we identified as supporting the occupation in a significant way. We outlined our particular concerns for each company, and asked that we be notified if our information was not accurate. If our information was correct, we asked that the company end its relationship to the occupation. A copy of Res. 204 was attached to each letter. Where incriminating photographs or other relevant materials were available, these were included. Each company had sixty days to reply, as required by the resolution.

Follow-up. Of the twenty-one companies that have been contacted, we have received nine replies. One company notified us that our information was inaccurate, because members of its founding family, rather than the company itself were involved in investments related to the occupation. This company was removed from the list. In every other case, we found the excuses provided were inadequate, and we wrote detailed replies explaining why we did not accept the explanations. In some cases, telephone discussions were also held.

Results. The task force has compiled an initial list of twenty companies from which it is recommending that United Methodist churches and investment managers in the New England Conference divest. Reasons for recommending divestment are provided for each company and those reasons are backed up with supporting documentation.

In addition, Resolution 204 asked for support for “those Israeli, Palestinian, and international organizations which bring Israelis and Palestinians together in dialogue, and work daily for peace with justice for both peoples.” A list of such organizations is being provided.

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 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.

William P. Aldrich, Chair
Divestment Task Force
Email: wpaldrich@cox.net