

“SO THEY WHO RUN MAY READ . . .”

“Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it.” (Hab. 2:2)

What Presbyterians Need To Know About the 2004 GA Divestment Action

WHAT LIES BEHIND the PCUSA 2004 decision to begin a “process of phased selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel, in accordance [with] General Assembly policy on social investing”?

This decision is paragraph seven of a resolution that also reiterates and reaffirms a call of previous assemblies to end the occupation that “has proven to be at the root of evil acts committed against innocent people on both sides of the conflict” and that condemns “horrific acts of violence and deadly attacks on innocent people, whether carried out by Palestinian ‘suicide bombers’ or by the Israeli military.”

1. **LONG INVOLVEMENT:** The Presbyterian Church has been involved in mission efforts in the Middle East for nearly two centuries. Since 1948 General Assemblies have repeatedly addressed issues involving Israel and Palestine, consistently affirming Israel’s right to exist within secure, internationally recognized borders and the right of Palestinians to self-determination. (The 1917 Balfour Declaration promoted “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people . . . *it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine . . .*”) More recent General Assembly actions have called for an end to the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian lands, which has continued since the 1967 war.

2. The conflict in the Middle East is **NOT BETWEEN TWO EQUAL PARTIES**. On the one hand are agrarian people who have quietly lived in the land for generations, almost continuously under domination by foreign rulers. They have limited hegemony and virtually no military power. On the other hand are people who have come to the land in modern times from other countries, who now constitute the world’s fourth strongest military power, even possessing nuclear weapons, and who enjoy unwavering support, both financial and diplomatic, from the world’s only superpower.

3. The **‘ORIGINAL SIN’** of the Palestinian people was that they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, living in the land at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. For generations they owned the property, lived in villages, tilled orchards, and reared their families. More than 750,000 Palestinians were driven into refugee camps, their homes confiscated and occupied by Israelis, or their homes demolished.

4. **UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTION 242** in 1967 called for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, effectively awarding Israel 78% of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea and anticipating the establishment of a Palestinian state in only 22% of the land across a border that became known as the Green Line.

(over)

5. In the 1970s and continuing today Israel has constructed **SETTLEMENTS** in the occupied territories in violation of international law (specifically in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention) and has ignored numerous United Nations resolutions condemning their expansion.

6. **PALESTINIAN SUFFERING** continues. *Homes are demolished, orchards uprooted, private lands confiscated. A separation barrier* (built largely on Palestinian lands and in some places a wall more than 25 feet high) prevents Palestinians from cultivating their fields and olive groves. Mobility is restricted by *countless checkpoints, arbitrary detentions and searches, roadblocks, and curfews. Israel controls all international borders, dominates airspace, and unfairly controls scarce water supplies. Discriminatory legislation* keeps families apart and restricts the rights of Palestinians who do manage to travel from returning to their homes. The situation is currently exacerbated by U.S. Government action that blocks humanitarian aid from reaching those who desperately need it.

7. Historically, as recently as 1920, **CHRISTIANS** accounted for 20% of the Palestinian population, continuing the first century witness in Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and other churches. The Christian population has declined sharply, however, to about **2% in Israel proper and 1.5% in the West Bank.** This Christian presence has provided significant influence in Palestinian affairs through leadership personnel and a wide range of educational institutions and other social ministries. The PCUSA maintains ecumenical partnerships with these Christian churches in the region, either directly or through the Middle East Council of Churches.

8. The **PCUSA DIVESTMENT ACTION has been welcomed** by these partner churches as evidence of support in their continuing suffering under occupation. The action is aimed at ending the occupation by challenging the policies of corporations that contribute to the oppression. *The “process of phased selective divestment” involves four stages:*

- (1) Identifying target companies (Five have been identified, including one with investments in Palestine.);
- (2) Engaging corporate management in discussions in an effort to get them to change their policies;
- (3) Failing that, initiating shareholder action to change those policies; and finally
- (4) Recommending divestment.

No divestment can take place without further specific action to do so.

And none is being recommended by MRTI to the 217th General Assembly.

This statement was drafted to provide information “on the run” for commissioners to the 217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) by the Middle East Focus Group and approved by the Peacemaking Committee of the Presbytery of Philadelphia.