

## Why Divestment? And Why Now?

By David Wildman



“The crisis was intensifying in the country, as more and more people were killed, maimed and imprisoned, as one town after another revolted against the apartheid regime, as the people refused to be oppressed or to co-operate with oppressors, facing death by the day... As the apartheid army moved into the towns to rule by the barrel of the gun, a number of [people of faith sought] to determine what response by the Church and by all Christians would be most appropriate.”

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## About This Issue

In its June 22, 2006 edition, The New York Times reported that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), at its general assembly in Birmingham, Ala., voted to back off from a 2004 decision it had made to divest from companies that profit from Israel's involvement in the Palestinian territories.

David Wildman, our feature writer, disagrees. The delegates, in fact, voted to continue to follow their investment guidelines which specify divestment as the appropriate last resort in challenging corporations.

The "spin" on reporting the vote highlights the controversy surrounding this subject. In this issue we look at divestiture as a nonviolent, moral strategy, and we address the claim that divesting from corporations doing business with Israel is anti-Semitic.

From 1976 to 1994, David Wildman was active in the South African anti-apartheid movement. Since 2001, he has served on the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation steering committee ([www.endtheoccupation.org](http://www.endtheoccupation.org)). Currently he serves as Executive Secretary, Human Rights & Racial Justice, with the General Board of Ministries, United Methodist Church.

We are saddened to report the death of Ambassador Talcott Seelye. For 24 years we have been honored to have his name listed with the directors in the adjacent column. A former ambassador to Tunisia and Syria, he was considered, according to The Washington Post, "one of the State Department's most experienced Middle East hands in the 1970s and 1980s." He surely was one of our most knowledgeable and supportive board members. We send our deepest condolences to his family.

John F. Mahoney  
Executive Director

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## Mapping Apartheid

My friend showed me a map in Hebrew that the Israeli military had given him. It outlined the planned route that the *hafrada*, or separation, barrier would take near his small village of Aboud on the West Bank. His family has 500 olive trees which have been in the family for centuries. Passed on from generation to generation, the trees were in small fields scattered here and there in the hillsides around Aboud.

"If they build the wall as they plan, I will be cut off from more than 200 of our trees. Some other families will lose even more. How will we survive?" he said. "If this wall is really about Israeli security—even the security for illegal settlers—then they could build the wall much closer to the settlement on the hill and let us keep more of our trees."

Each week Palestinians from Aboud go to argue with Israeli military officials about the route of the wall to save a few trees. They also hold weekly nonviolent demonstrations on Fridays to protest where the wall is being constructed. "The Israelis have a powerful military with guns, bulldozers and helicopters. We have our trees. To us they are like family. To uproot them is killing a part of us. We have no power to stop the soldiers. What else can we do?" he sighed.

That same week in January 2006, acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made his first foreign policy speech at the Herzliya Conference. "We must create a clear boundary as soon as possible, one which will reflect the demographic reality on the ground. Israel will maintain control over the security zones, the Jewish settlement blocs, and...first and foremost a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty. This is the path Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced several years ago."

In December 2005, B'Tselem, an Israeli

Human Rights group, and Bimkom–Planners for Planning Rights, issued a report entitled, “Under the Guise of Security: Routing the Separation Barrier to Enable the Expansion of Israeli Settlements in the West Bank.” It documents how the Israelis are routing the wall to grab as much land as possible to expand settlements by separating Palestinians from their lands and their water—all in violation of international law.

Now I want to return to that quote on the front page. It comes from “The Kairos Document,” issued in September 1985 by South African Christians as a challenge to churches to take a more active stance against apartheid. The call from Palestinian Christians and hundreds of Palestinian civil society grassroots organizations for “boycotts, divestment, and sanctions” (BDS) echoes the call by churches, trade unions and other organizations in South Africa more than 20 years ago. This quote captures the urgency and desperation many church members feel regarding the escalating oppression and violence of Israel’s longstanding military occupation and Palestinian resistance, especially in the last few years. The infrastructure of Israel’s illegal and immoral occupation—settlements, bypass roads, checkpoints, closures, the dividing wall—give visible evidence of Israel’s de facto apartheid policies aimed at unilaterally segregating by force not only Israelis from Palestinians but also Palestinians from one another, and more importantly, Palestinians from more and more of their land.

With the Oslo so-called peace process in tatters, Palestinian nonviolent activists called for international support in the form of an International Solidarity Movement (I.S.M.). The goal was to provide some measure of international protection to Palestinians suffering under occupation. For years the international community has failed to do this, due largely to repeated U.S. vetoes of U.N. Security Council resolutions calling for peacekeepers or international monitors. In the past six years, there have been eight vetoes in the U.N. Security Council, seven of which were cast by the United States in order to keep the U.N. from criticizing Israel.

### **When Words Fail: The Road to Divestment**

The growing “boycotts, divestment, and sanctions” campaigns comprise, I believe, a deeply democratic and democratizing nonviolent movement to uphold human rights and international law. For years most of the world has repeatedly documented and resolutely condemned Israel’s human rights violations, while the U.S. has effectively blocked any sanctions or enforcement measures

against Israel.

Today’s divestment movement—like the anti-apartheid movement before—broadens the base of people and institutions involved in decisions and actions based on equal rights for all—Palestinians and Israelis. Through boycott and divestment campaigns, a much wider range of actors—churches, students, trade unions—now seek nonviolent means to end Israel’s military occupation and systematic denial of Palestinian human rights.

To be clear, morally responsible investing, divestment, boycotts and sanctions are nonviolent, moral, economic measures that seek to change the bad behavior of corporations and of governments for moral reasons. While nonviolent, moral, economic campaigns often generate fierce opposition from those in power, it is crucial to note that divestment and other forms of Morally Responsible Investing (MRI) seek to end unjust, oppressive policies, not get rid of corporations or states. The same applies to MRI pressures on Israel and corporations that profit from occupation: they should end their oppressive practices.

When Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black community in Montgomery, Alabama mobilized a bus boycott, it was not to eliminate buses or the bus company. It was to end Jim Crow policies of segregation that the bus company refused to give up. The community chose a nonviolent form of protest to galvanize public and economic pressure to end an unjust system.

In May 2002, in response to the urgent crisis on the ground, hundreds of U.S. Christians gathered in Washington, D.C. for Ecumenical Middle East Advocacy Days. A National Council of Churches (N.C.C.) delegation had just returned from the region. Some of the delegates were among the first internationals allowed into the Jenin refugee camp by the Israeli military after Israel had leveled much of the camp, using U.S.-made and U.S.-provided Caterpillar bulldozers, Apache helicopters and F-16 fighter jets on a largely civilian population.

The N.C.C. delegation shared a statement they had issued following the trip on the urgent situation in Palestine/Israel and their hopes for peace. It was a clear articulation of principles of international law and human rights that called on full compliance with U.N. resolutions and an end to violence by all.

Two things struck me about the statement. First, it focused on human rights principles—ending the occupation, no more settlements, no violence against civilians—issues that have been included in various church statements and resolutions over the past 30 years. Second, the

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statement said nothing about U.S. policy and the U.S. role in the conflict. It failed to examine the “log in our own eye” as U.S. Christians. Each year our government directs billions of our taxpayer dollars to military and economic aid to Israel—which already has the largest military force in the entire region. U.S. aid enables and perpetuates Israel’s longstanding occupation and violence against Palestinian communities, which in turn makes justice and peace for all impossible.

That same day, the U.S. House and Senate overwhelmingly passed resolutions condemning Palestinian violence against Israeli civilians with no mention of any suffering by Palestinians, let alone violence by the Israeli military and Israeli settler/colonizers. I met with aides in the congressional offices of Clinton, Schumer and Nadler the next day. All of them opposed even a call to investigate whether war crimes, or violations of the U.S. Arms Export Control Act, which prohibits sale of military equipment to human rights violators, had occurred. Asked which was most important: upholding international law and protecting human rights, or supporting Israel, even if that might violate international and U.S. law, they all answered that unquestioning support of Israel was more important than protecting civilians, human rights, or the rule of law.

So, what to do?

Many international delegations of grassroots church folk, students, other human rights advocates, and Israeli activists have joined with Palestinian communities to confront the massive violence of Israeli Occupation Forces (I.O.F.) with nonviolent presence and resistance. Many have joined in solidarity with Palestinian farmers to help harvest olives only to be met by violent attacks from armed Israeli settlers. The I.O.F. then would arrive to arrest the nonviolent internationals, shoot at unarmed Palestinians, and protect the illegal Israeli settlers.

Many of these same folk, when they return to the U.S. and go to the halls of power, find their nonviolence, their commitment to equality for all, and their respect for international law all demonized as security threats, while the violence and apartheid policies of Israel are blindly blessed. It becomes clear that some lives (U.S. and Israeli) are worth more than others (Palestinian and internationals who stand with them, like Rachel Corrie). [See “Rachel,” *Link*, December 2003 – Ed.]

On July 9, 2005, the first anniversary of the International Court of Justice ruling condemning Israel’s wall built on Palestinian land, more than 170 Palestinian civil society organizations joined together in issuing a “Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel Until it

Complies with International Law and Universal Principles of Human Rights.” It reads:

We, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the Apartheid era. We appeal to you to pressure your respective states to impose embargoes and sanctions against Israel. We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this Call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace.

The call for BDS campaigns seeks for Israel to comply with its obligations under international law in three ways:

1. End its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantle the wall;
2. Recognize the full equality and rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel;
3. Respect, protect and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as called for in U.N. Resolution 194 (December, 1949).

### **The Apartheid Connection: South Africa & Israel**

Apartheid is a system within which people are separated from one another, *and kept apart from one another.*

The possibility that these groups *can* be brought together and that peaceful co-existence *can* replace tension and conflict is ruled out as a matter of principle. Therefore, ethnic groups, to the extent that this is possible, must be compelled, by law if necessary, to remain separate from one another, because the bringing of these groups of people together will necessarily result in conflict and the mutual threatening of one another.

The use of the phrase “separate development” in an attempt to replace the hated word “apartheid” in essence results in no change to the basic point of departure: the development of each group must still take place apart from that of other groups, because the development of one group is regarded as a threat to that of the other.

– from “A Statement on Apartheid and a Confession of Faith,” South Africa, 1982.

In the early 1980s churches in South Africa and around the world issued statements declaring apartheid a heresy and demanding concerted action on the part of churches to work for ending it. At the same time more and more university and college campuses across the U.S. and internationally were calling for divestment from corporations that profited from business relations with the apartheid regime. Likewise trade unions, cities and other municipalities mobilized to divest from corporations as an act of solidarity with the people of all races in South Africa who sought to end apartheid.

Throughout the 1980s, violence and oppression escalated in people's daily lives. The apartheid government declared a state of emergency and intensified brutal forms of repression involving beatings, targeted assassinations, and detention without trial of "suspected terrorists" (i.e., the supporters and members of the African National Congress). In the aftermath of Zimbabwe's liberation from apartheid rule in 1980, the South African military expanded its covert military operations, occupation forces and support for "Low Intensity Conflict" throughout southern Africa—in Angola, Southwest Africa (now Namibia), Mozambique, even as far north as Zambia—in an effort to destabilize the whole region.

While increasingly isolated in the arena of public opinion and moral discourse, the apartheid regime was not without its international supporters. Transnational corporations and banks continued to reap enormous profits from their operations in South Africa (far higher profit rates than in their domestic production). The Reagan administration in the U.S. rejected calls for sanctions and divestment, offering instead a policy of "constructive engagement" which meant little more than rhetorical criticism of certain actions but no systemic condemnation of the racist and brutal practices of the South African government.

Jerry Falwell, a founder of the Moral Majority and leading spokesman for the Christian right in the U.S., declared that the white government in South Africa was the "only democracy" on the African continent. Falwell and others saw the white government as a key pillar in the cold war fight against communism. In reality, the apartheid regime was the last colonial settler regime on a conti-

nent where all the colonizers and settlers had lost power. Today, Israel is one of the last places where a colonial settler project is seizing land from the indigenous population.

## Why Divest?

### The Sabeel Call to Nonviolent Action

One, it works. Two, it's moral. Three, it's nonviolent. Four, churches actually have years of experience in morally responsible investing/divesting. So, getting churches to do something they are already doing is a good strategy. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility—and the many church-related investors who are its members—has over 30 years of experience in corporate accountability, shareholder activism, divestment and other forms of

economic pressure to address a wide range of human rights, environmental and economic justice issues.

The Jerusalem-based Sabeel Center for Liberation Theology is a grassroots, ecumenical organization founded in 1990 by the Rev. Naim Ateek, former canon of St. George's Cathedral in

Jerusalem. It has chapters around the world, including the Friends of Sabeel—North America ([www.fosna.org](http://www.fosna.org)). In the spring of 2005, Sabeel issued "A Call for Morally Responsible Investing: A Nonviolent Response to the Occupation." As a Palestinian Christian organization, Sabeel directed its call primarily to churches in Europe and North America, summoning them to be good stewards of their resources, which means, among other things, that their investments "do no harm." If a corporation is found to be engaged in harmful behavior, churches have a moral obligation to do something about it.

Sabeel has taken the framework and principles of socially responsible investing—in use for more than 40 years regarding corporate accountability in other nations and human rights issues—and applied these to Israel's illegal and immoral occupation and apartheid practices. Its call urges churches to undertake a two step process in Morally Responsible Investing (MRI): first, exert pressures on corporations (both international and Israeli) whose activities support occupation and human rights violations; and second, if such pressure fails to effect corporate change, then churches should divest. Failure to act, once one becomes aware of immoral corporate behavior, constitutes tacit

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support for violence and injustice.

Sabeel recommends five interrelated strategies in the MRI process: (1) Avoidance of investments for moral reasons; (2) Involvement using dialogue and shareholder resolutions to promote corporate accountability; (3) Alternative investments that further justice and peace; (4) Withdrawal of investments for moral reasons; and (5) Reinvestment by shifting funds from corporations engaged in immoral actions, or later, reinvesting once corporate behavior has changed for the better.

Sabeel's call serves as a practical, educational tool for churches to combine ethical reflection with nonviolent action in a way that goes beyond resolutions to resolute action. As part of building support and involvement in MRI, Friends of Sabeel—North America has organized a series of regional conferences that bring together people long active in seeking justice in Palestine/Israel with those newly aware of the injustice and violence of Israel's occupation and apartheid wall. Despite concerted, preemptive and well-funded efforts by opponents to derail or isolate Friends of Sabeel events, they continue to attract widespread interest and participation among local churches and communities. Through these regional conferences Christians, Muslims and Jews, religious and secular activists are forging local alliances committed to further nonviolent action and advocacy.

Why issue the call for divestment at this time?

For most of the 1990s under the Oslo so-called peace process, the rest of the world lived in naïve hope that things were improving and moving towards a two-state solution. With Oslo, international attention shifted from the harsh realities of occupation, oppression and brutal Israeli repression of nonviolent Palestinian resistance during the first intifada, to negotiations in a peace process between two sides that rendered invisible the underlying injustice of occupation and displacement.

Meanwhile, the daily realities for Palestinians got ever worse. Poverty rates soared and the number of Israeli settlers seizing Palestinian land more than doubled from 1994-2000. In March 2000, Allegra Pacheco, an Israeli human rights attorney, critiqued then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak's campaign slogan, "Peace Through Separation" as in reality a form of Jim Crow segregation rather than support for a Palestinian state. "For there is no parity in separation or in closure—they function only one way....for Palestinians only; all 400,000 Jewish settlers in the Occupied Territories have freedom of movement."

The gap between peoples' hopes and expectations—for

a viable Palestinian state and the end to Israel's occupation—and the harsh realities they faced brought the Palestinian community to a breaking point. Again, Pacheco writes in early 2000: "The construction of separate checkpoints for Gaza and Bethlehem, of by-pass roads, and of the so-called 'safe passage' completes the segregation of settler Jews and Palestinian residents and ensures an apartheid system of legal rights and controls between the two populations." In September, 2000, Ariel Sharon provided the catalyst that ignited Palestinian anger and resentment when, accompanied by hundreds of Israeli soldiers, he paid a "visit" to Haram al-Sharif, Islam's third holiest site.

Six years later, the violence of the second intifada and Israel's military response have deepened people's desperation and determination that the occupation must end. Perhaps most significantly, the power of the dividing wall to visualize the evils and apartheid policies of ongoing military occupation has served as a catalyst to growing movements for BDS in the past five years. The systemic injustice of occupation and daily human rights violations of land grabbing settlements are not new, but the wall symbolizes the dictatorial way in which the Israelis continue to impose their will, their definition of security, onto Palestinians in violation of international law and contrary to the will of the international community.

## **The Campus Movements**

Campus divestment movements began to spring up in late 2000 almost immediately after the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifada. Since 2001, campus divestment and boycott movements, combined with the presence in the occupied territories of the International Solidarity Movement and the Christian Peacemaker Teams, have helped raise the level of public awareness on the need to respond to the violence of occupation. The Palestine Solidarity Movement (P.S.M.) has held five annual conferences to bring together student activists from many campuses to strategize and share resources from their boycott, divestment, sanctions campaigns. The most recent P.S.M. conference was held in Washington, D.C. in February 2006. While earlier conferences were forums for political speeches, analysis, publicity and outreach, this one emphasized working sessions on the specifics for building a BDS campaign on campus.

Given the transitory nature of student bodies and the reluctance of college administrations to comply quickly with student demands—especially on investment decisions—it is not surprising that momentum among campus

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BDS campaigns has ebbed and flowed. Most campaigns involve a petition drive that reaches out to students, faculty, staff and alumni calling for divestment from corporations doing business in Israel or ones that specifically profit from, or support, Israel's occupation (e.g., arms manufacturers, Caterpillar).

BDS campaigns provide an action framework for campus organizing that connects schools with the urgency on the ground. Fierce opposition of groups like Campus Watch, the David Project, etc. also generates heated debate. Campus BDS campaigns have led to some very creative tactics. Students at the University of California-Berkeley set up mock checkpoints at the entrance to its campus (one for "Israelis" who entered easily, and one for "Palestinians" who were all stopped and harassed). Others have used an inflatable apartheid wall to visualize the impact on daily life of the concrete slabs that tower to 24 feet as they tear through population centers.

The University of Wisconsin Divestment from Israel campaign has done extensive organizing and educating, including the publishing of a Divestment Guide that many campuses now use. The Association of University of Wisconsin Professionals, an American Federation of Teachers local that represents faculty and academic staff on 25 U.W. campuses statewide, adopted a divestment resolution in April 2005 that specifies divestment from companies that "provide material aid to the Israeli Army in the form of weapons, equipment, and supporting systems used to perpetrate human rights abuses against Palestinian civilians."

Both the pace and approaches of today's campus BDS movements have much in common with those in the anti-apartheid movement. I participated in divestment movements on three campuses from 1976-1985. The killing of nonviolent students in Soweto in 1976 and the torture and murder of Steve Biko in September 1977 both sparked increased activism on many campuses, but it took years to bear fruit in actual divestment. By the mid-eighties shantytowns began to appear on campuses to dramatize the injustice of apartheid. More important than the actual decision to divest was the widespread educating and organizing taking place on campuses around the world. Campaigns created openings for speakers, film festivals, concerts, rallies and other events all aimed at nonviolent pressure to end apartheid.

A major challenge for the BDS movement today, is to find more effective ways to link campus, church and other movements in the same localities. Every college campus has churches nearby and vice versa. Trade unions with

pension funds also have members in every university town. Campus movements are also making links with anti-war actions. Almost every demonstration against the U.S. war in Iraq has signs calling for an end of occupation – in Iraq and in Palestine.

### **The Movement Towards Church Divestment: From Statements Ignored to Nonviolent Actions**

In 2001, the World Council of Churches held consultations involving church representatives, Palestinians and Israeli peace groups. The harsh realities of occupation affected even these meetings in Geneva, as Israel denied Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza permission to travel.

The goal was to develop nonviolent action strategies that would respond to the pleas of Palestinian Christians as well as move the ecumenical community beyond statements to action. The urgency of the violence on the ground led the W.C.C. to select "End the Illegal Occupation of Palestine" as the focus for 2002 in their Decade to Overcome Violence. These meetings led to the formation of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine & Israel (EAPPI) which brings trained accompaniers primarily from European, North American, and South African churches to the occupied territories for three to six months to accompany Palestinians at checkpoints, and provide an international peace presence which has been repeatedly rejected by Israel and vetoed by the U.S. in the U.N. Security Council. Accompaniers then go home to build stronger advocacy for justice in Palestine/Israel.

In February 2005, the W.C.C. urged its 340 member churches, with 550 million Orthodox and Protestant Christians in over 100 countries, to consider selective divestment from international corporations, like Caterpillar, and from Israeli companies that profit from and perpetuate the occupation and human rights violations. Widespread support for further nonviolent economic pressures continued at the W.C.C. General Assembly held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in February 2006. In addition, the W.C.C. will make witness for justice and peace in the Middle East an ongoing programmatic emphasis in coming years. Working with churches in Jerusalem, the W.C.C. mobilized churches for a global week of action in March 2006 to end Israel's occupation and to uphold human rights for all. In 2007, it is hoped the Global Week of Action will coincide with the 40th anniversary of the occupation.

If one examines denominational statements from the fall of 2000, it becomes clearer why so many churches are

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taking up BDS campaigns. For instance, the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church (GBGM), on October 17, 2000, three weeks after the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifada, stated: "We recognize the current popular protest is an expression of deep Palestinian frustration over the ongoing disrespect, dehumanization, and denial of their basic human and national rights by an unjust political system. We are appalled by the excessive use of force by Israeli military personnel and police forces, especially against children and youth, in efforts to disperse Palestinian demonstrators and protestors on both sides of the Green Line. These tragic events have left over 90 persons dead and thousands wounded, many of whom are children and youth who will continue to suffer from these serious and incapacitating injuries."

GBGM directors noted with alarm Israeli military interference with medical personnel, blocking of access to medical treatment, and firing on ambulances. The statement calls on Israel to respect international law and remove their forces from occupied Palestinian territories, for Palestinians to refrain from firing small arms and to use nonviolent forms of protest; and for the U.S. to mobilize U.N. involvement to investigate human rights violations and halt arms sales to Israel.

In May 2001, the United Methodist Council of Bishops spoke out forcefully calling on "the U.S. government, through Congress, to use all measures possible, including the cutting off of all funding to the Israeli government, to insure that the following conditions are met: All human rights violations cease. No more Jewish settlements are built in occupied territories. All home demolitions cease."

Yet such denominational resolutions notwithstanding, human rights violations, Jewish settlement, and home demolitions all increased. U.S. military and economic aid to Israel also increased. Several United Methodist Bishops who had been to Palestine/Israel sought for months a meeting with President Bush, himself a United Methodist. Finally, the second week of October 2002, the bishops got official word that the President would not meet with them to discuss ways to peace in the Middle East. That very day, the White House delivered a taped greeting from the President to a Christian Coalition "Stand for Israel" rally—a rally that called for more military aid to Israel and more financial support for Jewish settlements from U.S. Christians. Painfully, these events exposed the need for concerted nonviolent strategies such as divestment.

In May 2004, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution reaffirming its longstanding opposition to Israel's occupation, to settle-

ments and to all human rights violations, and it urged "the U.S. government to end all military aid to the region and to redistribute the aid to support economic development within Palestinian communities." It further urged Palestinian religious leaders "to publicly condemn violence against Israeli civilians and to use nonviolent acts of disobedience to resist the occupation and the illegal settlements." Finally, it called on United Methodists to "support, and participate in, the work of international peace and human rights organizations to provide protection for Palestinians and Israelis seeking nonviolently to end the occupation."

One year later, two annual conferences of the United Methodist Church—Virginia and New England—adopted resolutions initiating a phased, selective divestment process. These resolutions simply applied the church-wide guidelines for divestment to the horrendous human rights violations of Israel's occupation and companies that support and profit from occupation.

In January 2006, the General Board of Global Ministries organized a delegation of Annual Conference teams to visit Palestine/Israel as a means of strengthening local action for justice and peace efforts to implement United Methodist commitment to human rights for all.

In June of 2006, several United Methodist Annual Conferences adopted divestment resolutions that will initiate a process of morally responsible investing at local and regional levels as the church moves to its next General Conference in 2008. The North Central New York Annual Conference resolution, approved by some 80 percent, calls for various United Methodist investment committees to "review their investment portfolios and identify companies that are supporting, in a significant way, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories or that cause harm to Palestinians or Israelis, and begin the phased selective process using dialogue, shareholder action, and as a last resort divestment using the Investment Ethics policy #213 in the Book of Resolutions 2004."

At its 216th General Assembly in July 2004, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PCUSA) adopted a resolution that called on its Mission Through Investment Committee (MRTI) "to initiate a process of phased selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel, in accordance to General Assembly policy on social investing and to make appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly Council for action." These are the words that have sparked so many bitter attacks from organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the Simon Wiesenthal

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Center.

In November 2004, the MRTI committee named four criteria for selecting corporations whose practices they would seek to challenge and change, because their activities and/or products were used to: (1) support and maintain the occupation; (2) establish, expand, or maintain Israeli settlements; (3) support or facilitate violent acts by Israelis or Palestinians against innocent civilians; and (4) support or facilitate the construction of the separation barrier.

After extensive research, the committee selected five corporations that fit one or more of the above categories; they are:

–Caterpillar, whose heavy equipment has been used repeatedly to bulldoze Palestinian homes, uproot trees, and construct roads and infrastructure on Palestinian land for Israeli settlers and military only.

–Citigroup, which has transferred funds that were later seen to be supporting families of Palestinian suicide bombers.

–ITT Industries, which supplies electronic, communication and night vision equipment to the Israeli military that is used in the occupied territories.

–Motorola, which sells wireless, encrypted communications equipment for use by the Israeli military in the occupied territories. It is also a majority investor in an Israeli cell phone company that operates in the West Bank in violation of the 1995 Oslo Agreement that stipulates that the Palestine Authority must approve all such licensing agreements.

–United Technologies, a large military contractor, has provided helicopters and other military hardware that the Israeli military has used in attacks in the occupied territories.

Phased selective divestment now calls for several progressive steps in corporate engagement common to all corporate accountability work: dialogue with corporate management (through letters and face-to-face meetings); shareholder resolutions; and, as a last resort, divestment. In addition to letters addressed to all five companies, the

MRTI committee has met with Motorola, ITT Industries and Citigroup to discuss their concerns and request a change. And for three years shareholders and U.S. Campaign to End Israeli Occupation member groups have demanded Caterpillar end its sales to Israel. Rachel Corrie's parents spoke this year at CAT's June 14th annual meeting and delivered 6,000 postcards collected by the U.S. Campaign urging CAT C.E.O. Jim Owens to end sales to Israel until Israel ends its human rights violations.

The Presbyterian Church USA's 217th General Assembly met in Birmingham, Alabama from June 15-22, 2006. There was extensive debate over the process of "phased selective divestment." Enormous pressures were exerted to stop their nonviolent efforts at corporate engagement. A letter signed by leaders from twelve major Jewish organizations was sent to the over 700 Presbyterian commissioners.

Referring to the Presbyterian policy adopted in 2004, the letter states, "We believe that this policy undermines peace, promotes extremism, exacerbates conflict... [D]ivestment is a bludgeon that provokes extreme responses from all sides."

It was truly ironic that this letter uses the same charges against the Presbyterian Church that white clergy aimed against the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1963 for engaging in nonviolent civil disobedience. These charges occasioned King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" which still applies today. King wrote, "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily

**"We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed..."**

**Martin Luther King, Jr.  
"A Letter from a Birmingham Jail"**

given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.... I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist.... Was not [the biblical prophet] Amos an extremist for justice [?]? So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?"

In the face of tremendous pressure, the PCUSA reaffirmed its nonviolent economic strategies of corporate engagement to end the occupation. At the same time it acknowledged the hurt and misunderstanding felt by

many. The new, more concise language, which was adopted in place of the paragraph on “phased selective divestment,” now reads: “To urge that financial investments of the PCUSA, as they pertain to Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank, be invested in only peaceful pursuits, and affirm that the customary corporate engagement process of...our denomination is the proper vehicle for achieving this goal.”

The decision affirms that the work of the MRTI in morally responsible investing is the appropriate approach and that corporate engagement with the five companies named above will continue. Nonviolent efforts to end the occupation, to dismantle all of the wall built on Palestinian land, and efforts to promote justice and peace for all will continue. Divestment, while not named up front, continues to be the appropriate last resort in Presbyterian investment guidelines dating back to 1984.

Yet, many initial mainstream media reports wrongly asserted, following the lead of divestment critics, that the Presbyterians had “apologized for” and “revoked” the 2004 divestment decision. The U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation and Jewish Voice for Peace, which had members present in Birmingham, immediately challenged such misleading media tactics. In a June 23, 2006 press release entitled, “Media Distortions” the J.V.P. applauded the Presbyterians “for standing fast to their principles while also showing that they are willing to go the extra mile to maintain positive relationships with Jews across the spectrum of our community.”

### From Obstacles to Opportunities

Almost every day, I get an email update of another divestment action, or call for a boycott, from somewhere in the world. Large or small, all these efforts convey a growing international movement to use nonviolent economic means of pressing Israeli institutions and society, as well as corporations, to get the Israeli government to end its occupation and apartheid policies.

There are now several additional web lists of Israeli products such as the Boycott Israel Goods (BIG) Campaign in Britain. BIG combines boycotts of Israeli products and Israeli tourism with divestment efforts as well as pressures on the British government to suspend trade agreements with Israel.

A major area of visible efforts is sports and cultural boycotts. A few months ago the Israeli military shelled a soccer field in Gaza. This provoked many European soccer officials to call for sanctioning against Israeli teams until reparations were made.

Still, it must be said that, so far, more time and energy by churches has gone into addressing critics than to actually implementing various MRI strategies. The Presbyterians first made a decision at their July 2004 General Assembly to begin a process of “phased selective divestment.” By September, when I looked at the PCUSA website, I could not find the text of the resolution. What I did find were pages of materials about Jewish-Christian dialogue and the longstanding commitment of the Presbyterian Church to a secure state of Israel, to Jewish-Christian relations, and so on.

I immediately contacted my Presbyterian colleagues to ask, Where is the resolution? What I discovered was that the Presbyterians, Sabeel and many other churches were being subjected to vicious attacks for advocating nonviolent, moral forms of action to back up their decades of statements opposing Israel’s occupation and violation of Palestinian human rights. I will examine ten claims that opponents of boycott, divestment and sanctions make.

**First** is the claim that BDS is anti-Semitic. BDS clearly threatens Israel’s military occupation and its ongoing discrimination and human rights violations. But are critics really suggesting that collective punishment, home demolitions, targeted assassinations, curfews, the uprooting of over a million trees, etc. are Jewish practices? These are gross violations of international law and must be condemned and challenged wherever they occur. Indeed, churches that have adopted some type of divestment process have condemned military occupation and segregation in other places as well.

**Second** is the claim that the Sabeel Center is one of the greatest threats to Israel. Sabeel is a Palestinian Christian organization deeply committed to justice and nonviolence. They condemn suicide attacks, they condemn the occupation, and they condemn the continued denial of Palestinian refugees’ right of return. Perhaps it is because of Sabeel’s public, nonviolent stance that critics desperately seek to associate it with violence, thereby limiting its impact. On June 17, 2006, the Episcopal Peace Fellowship in the U.S. honored Sabeel’s founder, Naim Ateek, for his nonviolent ministry partly as “a rebuke to those voices who would silence Naim’s own strong voice as a Palestinian and a Christian living under occupation.”

**Third**, BDS is criticized for being negative and not offering an opportunity for positive investment. Such criticism implies morally responsible investing is an either/or proposition, but it is easy to both divest from a corporation like Caterpillar and at the same time seek positive investments within the Palestinian communities to help

provide employment. Fair trade olive oil and other Palestinian products do exist and are vital businesses already supported by many churches. The fact remains, however, that Israeli occupation forces have destroyed many Palestinian businesses and even projects funded by “positive” international investments. Ending the occupation and dismantling apartheid will do far more to realize justice for all in Palestine/Israel.

And consider this: there is a long history of investing in Israel bonds by the Jewish community, by Christian Zionists, even by some trade unions and pension funds in the U.S. The return on Israel bonds is below that of U.S. bonds and they are a higher risk investment, yet state legislatures have changed state laws to enable unions and pension funds specifically to invest in below-grade Israel bonds. Labor leaders have pushed hard to get union pensions to invest in Israel bonds. In 1998, John Sweeney, head of the AFL-CIO, received the Israeli Bonds 50th anniversary Labor Achievement Award for his efforts to boost union pension holdings of Israel bonds. These investments both jeopardize worker pension returns, and provide financial resources for furthering the infrastructure of occupation—bypass roads, settlements, checkpoints, and the wall, which costs millions of dollars per mile to build.

An increasing number of rank and file union members, along with progressive union leaders, are challenging these investments as harmful to U.S. workers, Palestinian workers, and Israeli workers, too. Thus Israel bonds are now becoming a focus for divestment and boycott by union members and others. When 2,000 UAW workers in Detroit marched in protest over such investments, the UAW divested.

**Fourth** is the claim that churches are, in effect, funding and promoting the aims of terrorists through divestment and boycott strategies. This is an ugly and slanderous attack that again tries to shift attention away from the flagrant violations of international law in Israel’s longstanding occupation and apartheid policies. Yet it raises an important point. For Palestinians, internationals like Rachel Corrie, and Israeli human rights and peace activists, Israel’s practices that devastate the lives and livelihood of so many Palestinians are a form of state terror. We need to reframe the question: are churches and universities, in so far as they have not yet divested, tacitly or openly profiting from the ongoing terror of occupation and apartheid?

Let’s push the criticism further. What is it that Christian Zionist organizations, such as Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (i.e., illegal settlements), are doing

when they adopt an Israeli settlement and when they send what has amounted to millions of dollars to support illegal settlements—including night goggles, bullet-proof vests, bullet-proof vehicles. The aid goes to armed, paramilitary communities of immigrants who are living on land taken from Palestinians at gunpoint. Christian Zionist organizations are in effect fundraising from well-meaning U.S. Christians to finance and support armed colonization in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem in direct violation of international law. And they are doing it with tax-deductible money. This is indeed something that needs to be challenged and stopped by nonviolent direct action of BDS.

**Fifth** is the claim that churches are being co-opted by the Arab boycott, and being led by Arab governments. What nonsense. Arab governments have rarely done anything other than offer lip service to supporting human rights in general and Palestinian rights in particular. Several Arab governments have large contracts with Caterpillar and have yet to challenge Caterpillar on the misuse of its equipment by Israeli military. Churches and other groups are connecting, and working in partnership, with Palestinian civil society and with Palestinian Christians—not with political parties or governments.

But this claim does raise a critical point about foreign government influence. We must ask who is being manipulated by AIPAC and the Israeli government. Many U.S. Congress members receive campaign contributions from a lobbying body, AIPAC, to repeatedly allocate massive amounts of public, taxpayer monies to aid and abet violations of international law (e.g., bypass roads) by both U.S. corporations and the Israeli government.

**Sixth**, churches are being told that the problem with divestment is that it is not nice, that it creates a strain on Jewish-Christian relations here in the U.S. Indeed, the apartheid wall is not nice, military occupation is not nice, the denial of rights to Palestinian refugees is not nice. This claim suggests that Christian relations with Jewish groups here at home are more valuable than relations with Palestinians and Israeli human rights advocates in Palestine/Israel. What’s happening is that U.S. churches are at last repenting from polite silence to take on prophetic action.

**Seventh** is the claim that Israel is being singled out for criticism. There is some irony in this claim. For years, Israel was singled out for its exemption from criticism. In over 30 years of shareholder resolutions by the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, 2004 was the first time that a shareholder resolution addressed a corpora-

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tion, in this case Caterpillar, that was profiting from, and supporting Israel's illegal military occupation. Morally responsible investors have challenged corporations in China, Burma, Sudan, Indonesia, South Africa, but not in Israel. They have challenged corporate links with military and paramilitary forces in Colombia, Nigeria and Liberia, but not in Israel. The U.S. government has imposed sanctions on Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Sudan, North Korea, and Cuba, but not on Israel.

**Eighth** is the "let's talk about this before we act" criticism. The dialogue approach invariably sends a message to wait. Be patient with occupation and human rights violations. We in churches need to be honest and confess that years of Jewish-Christian dialogue in the U.S. has primarily served to keep church criticism of Israeli policies on the level of words/rhetoric alone.

Last September, there was a trip of Jewish and Christian leaders to Israel/Palestine. The trip was at the request of leaders in the Jewish community from the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League. It was offered as a way of improving Jewish-Christian relations in the U.S. in relation to Palestine/Israel. They agreed beforehand that each side would have a chance to shape half of the agenda. The Christians wanted to meet with Sabeel and the Jewish participants initially refused. Finally, after much discussion a meeting with Rev. Naim Ateek at Sabeel was included. After the trip, more time went to follow-up discussions. All the while, Israel's apartheid wall construction continued to devour more and more Palestinian land, trees, and hopes.

I asked some of my colleagues who went on the trip about their stewardship of time. Countless hours and days were devoted to preparing and debating the format of the trip, going on the trip, and then reflecting and processing the trip afterwards. Will an equal amount of time and energy go into mobilizing people in churches for non-violent, moral economic pressures like boycotts, divestment and sanctions to end Israel's expanding apartheid? Do we in U.S. churches listen and work as closely with our Palestinian sisters and brothers? With Israeli human rights and peace advocates?

One should ask what concrete measures groups like AJC have taken since the trip to end the violence and injustice in Palestine/Israel? On May 12, 2006 AJC announced that it was reviving its Anti-Boycott Fund to fight any such efforts with an additional \$10,000 contribution to build on its initial \$10,000 last year. AJC, ADL and other critics of BDS have scoured websites and done word searches on all of Naim Ateek and Sabeel's writings with

the sole purpose of discrediting, vilifying, and silencing all nonviolent efforts by churches that seek to end Israel's occupation, settlements, and human rights violations.

The newly formed Combatants for Peace, comprised of Israeli and Palestinian former combatants, offers an alternative kind of dialogue that sees peace as based on ending oppression. They share two goals for their work: "an end to Israeli settlements and military incursions, and the creation of clear frontiers between independent Israeli and Palestinian states." Among their hopes is to create an alternative for young people to the military or militia groups (see Christian Science Monitor, April 6, 2006).

**Ninth** is the claim that Christian leaders who advocate nonviolent direct action like divestment, are naïve, misinformed and mean well but are being manipulated. Quite the contrary, many people from churches, colleges and other communities in the U.S. have traveled numerous times to the West Bank and Gaza to accompany Palestinians in their olive harvests, and have had to walk through Israeli checkpoints. Many internationals have experienced first hand Israeli tear gas and interrogations; they have encountered U.S.-born Jewish settlers armed with machine guns yelling at Christian peacemakers for "supporting violence." We have also met with Israeli refuseniks (who either refuse to serve in the Israeli military at all or refuse to serve in the occupied territories) and with former Israeli soldiers from groups like Breaking the Silence that are speaking out against unjust military orders that perpetuate occupation and oppression in the name of security. We have met with both Palestinians and Israelis who have had loved ones killed, who are now saying, "Enough! The violence and occupation must stop now."

**Tenth** is a divide-and-conquer approach, whereby it is argued that divestment resolutions are promoted by national leadership while local churches are said to be against them. In fact, many divestment and boycott initiatives are coming from local and regional church groups and campuses, not from national leadership. Since 2004 national organizations like ADL, AJC, and Hillel have prepared talking points for local Jewish congregations to use in relation to local Presbyterian churches and other denominations to rescind the "phased selective divestment" resolutions or at least strip any action components.

One thing, though, should be acknowledged about the above 10 claims: as we move forward in the process of divestment and nonviolent pressure, the critics of divestment, to date, have succeeded far more in getting divestment into the mainstream media than have the advocates

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of morally responsible investing.

## Conclusion

In 1970, the apartheid government of South Africa enacted the “Black Homeland Citizenship Act” which declared blacks to be citizens of various “homelands” thereby guaranteeing whites would be a demographic majority in “white” South Africa (87 percent of the land area).

Israelis also are obsessed with their “demographic problem” of maintaining a Jewish majority. In 1947 and early 1948 the Zionists seized Palestinian land outside the area awarded to them in the 1947 U.N. Partition Plan. In the moment before this territorial expansion, Palestinians constituted 60 percent of the population in the combined areas and Jews 40 percent. Led by David Ben-Gurion, et al., however, the Zionists cleansed over 700 of the seized Palestinian towns and villages so that by May, 1948, Jews constituted 60 percent of the population and Palestinians 40 percent! Within one year, the Palestinian population dropped to less than 20 percent of Israel’s population.

The rationale for this cleansing was laid down by Ben-Gurion himself: “There can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent.” In 2003, Netanyahu reiterated Ben-Gurion’s 60/40 split as marking the end of the Jewish state, and he also saw the 20 percent Arab population within Israel as troubling: “If the relationship with these 20 percent is problematic, the state is entitled to take extreme measures.”

In his first major speech as acting prime minister in January 2006, Ehud Olmert outlined his plan of *hitkansut*, or in-gathering, that would unilaterally set borders. Israel would comprise 88 percent of historic Palestine—almost the same percentage as apartheid white South Africa in the 1970s. B’Tselem, in analyzing the impact of the wall, concludes, “Israel has established in the occupied territories a separation cum discrimination regime, in which it maintains two systems of laws, and a person’s rights are based on his or her national origin. This regime is the only one of its kind in the world, and brings to mind dark regimes of the past, such as the Apartheid regime in South Africa.”

The increasing talk by Israeli leaders about their “demographic problem”—that Jews will cease to be a large majority of the population in Israel—in reality expresses their fear of a democratic secular state. Ironically, their own actions have made this option much more likely. Recent laws that deny Israelis who marry Palestinians the right to live together in Israel are a case in point.

While the underlying goal is to restrict the non-Jewish population in Israel, they serve to expose the apartheid quality of Israeli society.

The Gospel of Luke (18:1-8) tells of a widow who keeps coming to an unjust judge, saying “Grant me justice against my opponent.” For a while the judge refuses, but later he says “Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out.” The text offers a grieving woman living under occupation, who has lost everything, as a model for nonviolent, determined action for eroding injustice.

All of the texts in the New Testament were written by people, and for communities, living under military occupation and in the midst of armed resistance to Roman military rule. Early Christians were often attacked for subverting the empire and accused of being terrorists. The same attacks erupt today from the apologists for empire and colonization when people engage in nonviolent, moral resistance like divestment.

I want to close with a call to hope and action. In 1985, when South African Christians released the Kairos Document, cited at the beginning of this article, they were in the depths of a state of emergency. Who would have imagined that five years later Nelson Mandela—labeled by the apartheid government as a terrorist and member of a terrorist organization—would be released from 27 years of imprisonment? In 1985, who would have imagined that nine years later, Mandela would be the first democratically elected president of South Africa? The hope and struggle are not necessarily what seem realistic right now, but what will be.

That same year of 1985, the number of campuses that voted to divest from South Africa doubled. Suddenly it became fashionable for college faculty, students, churches, trade unions, even state legislators and U.S. Congress members to get arrested doing civil disobedience blocking entrances to South African consulates. Soon thereafter the U.S. Congress overrode President Reagan’s veto to enact the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Sanctions act.

This is the hope of boycott, divestment, sanctions campaigns: that the global movement and public visibility of nonviolent moral pressures around the world will grow and match the nonviolent resistance of Palestinians and of Israeli human rights advocates until that day when justice and equality replace occupation and apartheid. ■

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