

Methodists consider divesting from Israeli occupation

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy | Apr. 27, 2012 NCR Today

The United Methodist Church General Conference, which has been meeting in Tampa Bay, Fla., this week, is considering a resolution calling for the divestment from three companies that facilitate the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Almost 300 delegates listened during lunch Wednesday as a Palestinian Christian and Israeli Jew talked about what is needed to end the Israeli occupation, writes journalist and activist Pam Bailey, [who is posting reports](#) [1] on the divestment initiative for the blog *Mondoweiss*.

Bailey writes:

"The clear message from both: Palestinians have suffered for too long, and words are no longer enough. Resolutions condemning home demolitions, settlement expansion, wall building, etc. -- which the UM began adopting in 1988 -- must be backed up with tangible action if the church is to maintain its position of moral leadership. If the UMGC passes Petition 21071 ("Aligning UMC Investments with Resolutions on Israel/Palestine"), the church pension fund -- the largest of all religious institutions in the United States -- will divest its holdings in three American companies that help enable the occupation: Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard and Motorola Solutions. And, it will serve as an inspiring example for the Presbyterian Church, which will vote on a similar resolution in July."

Bailey reports that Daoud Nasser, a Palestinian Christian from Bethlehem, told the Methodists about his family's struggle to hold onto land his grandfather purchased from the Ottomans in 1916. For the last two decades, Israel has been trying to seize the property for settlement construction.

In 2009, I visited Nasser's hillside farm. Located south of Bethlehem, well within the borders of the West Bank, it is surrounded by Jewish-only settlements that sprawl in every direction. In a creative attempt to stop the encroachment, the Nassers have transformed into the [Tent of Nations](#) [2], an environmental and educational farm promoting peace. Its motto is "Love Your Enemies."

Nasser was followed by Dalit Baum, a Jewish Israeli and co-founder of the website [Who Profits from the Occupation](#) [3].

Here's Bailey's summary of Baum's presentation:

"We keep talking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict like it is symmetrical. But it is not," Dalit said. "What you have here is a system of ongoing colonization, segregation and repression. And the three companies from which we are asking the United Methodist Church to divest help keep that system in place."

- Motorola Solutions has developed a motion-detection system specifically for a "virtual fence"

around settlements that it has given the brand name "Moto Eagle." Simply put, the surveillance system assures that broad swaths of land are "Palestinian-free."

- Hewlett Packard makes biometric tracking equipment for checkpoints that is used by Israelis to collect and store handprints from Palestinians travellers, allowing them to be tracked and, often, denied passage.
- Caterpillar became the symbol of occupation after a driver of one of its bulldozers ran over and killed activist Rachel Corrie in the Gaza Strip. "In 2006 in Lebanon and in 2008 in Gaza, the front line of the Israeli military was a line of unmanned Caterpillar bulldozers, sent in to level all neighborhoods," said Dalit. "These bulldozers are sold, and used, as weapons."

"The United Methodist church should not be involved in financing the manufacture of equipment used to colonize, segregate and repress," said Dalit. "It's that simple."

More than 1,200 rabbis signed a letter earlier this month urging the Methodists and Presbyterians not to support a policy of divestment to pressure Israel, saying that to do so would be "one-sided" and damaging to Christian/Jewish relationships. But Jewish Voices for Peace has come out in support of the resolution, which specifically targets companies for facilitating the Israeli occupation.

Wednesday's luncheon was sponsored by United Methodist Kairos Response, a group named after a 2009 document from the Palestinian Christian community titled, "In Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth." The document urges churches around the world to "stand against injustice and apartheid and work for a just peace in the region."

The Methodists' consideration of the divestment proposals comes just days after a *60 Minutes* special that attributes the dwindling number of Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land to the hardships of the Israeli occupation.

You can view the video here:

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Links:

[1] <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/04/moment-of-truth-report-from-day-two-of-the-united-methodist-general-conference.html>

[2] <http://www.tentofnations.org/>

[3] <http://www.whoprofits.org/>