

June 8, 2012



Dear JCPA,

I cannot sign this letter opposing PCUSA's effort to make selective divestment official church policy. I have written many statements detailing my support for selective divestment. You can find them on the JVP and F.O.R* websites.

The JCPA letter is deeply flawed in its rationale. Palestinians and not Jews are the targets of systematic violence by Israel. This is what this letter fails to grasp or acknowledge: the systematic violence of Israel's military occupation is driving the conflict.

It is naive to think that any serious struggle against systematic state violence and military occupation can be won by instituting co-existence projects alone. First of all, such projects are limited by the structural problems that occupation imposes on the entire population of Palestine such as the lack of freedom of movement, the inability to export and the system of permits to name a few.

Secondly, people who are victims of systematic violence have the right to determine their own methods of resistance. Gandhian methods of conflict transformation embrace both noncooperation and constructive peace building. Palestinians are engaged in both, as are Presbyterians in relationship to the conflict. Selective divestment is a form of noncooperation that targets the system of occupation. Palestinians have chosen this method of nonviolent struggle. It's a no brainer.

Most Jews and Christians are not willing to go to Palestine to personally resist Israeli policies of land confiscation, home demolition, destruction of trees and property, military invasion, denial of freedom of movement, administrative detention or the arrest of children through nonviolent protest. Most Jews and Christians do not travel to Israel to work for an end to the blockade of Gaza and are not shot when they try to harvest their wheat or fish in the sea. Gazans have 6 hours of electricity a day which means there is virtually no refrigeration. Are the authors of this letter suggesting that humanitarian aid is a solution to Israel's policy of occupation? Occupation is a form of structural violence. One side has access to water, the other side does not due to occupation policy. If an organization advocate a project to dig wells, for instance, it will be severely limited by the inability of Palestinians to dig a deep enough well to access water, even if they pay for the pump.

This is what selective divestment addresses: the structural violence of occupation. Selective divestment places pressure on companies linked to the Israeli occupation or to non-peaceful pursuits to advocate for change or stop doing business.

As someone who lived through the Civil Rights Movement in America, I learned that it was noncooperation in the form of direct action, such as the Montgomery bus boycott, that provided the real push for change. White people who rode the Freedom Bus, joined in voter registration, walked for desegregation and joined the African American community in jail helped end the violent system of legalized segregation. One only has to read the letter MLK wrote to dissenting clergy while he sat in the Birmingham jail to understand this point. At the time, working for peace and justice meant that white people who wanted to be allies to the effort of ending segregation had to be willing to sit in jail. Struggling together in this way was an authentic act of love.

Today, supporting selective divestment is an act of love and faith and hope. It is not an act that offends me or makes me feel unjustly targeted as a Jew. The opposite. Selective divestment is a form of nonviolent direct action that is aligned with my values as a person committed to Jewish nonviolence and the way I understand my tradition. One should not profit from anything produced through violent means. If a person's retirement fund is made fatter because it earns money invested in Caterpillar, that person should divest. Not to do so is violating Jewish law. Why can't people invest in peace and divest from violence at the same time?

Those of us in the Jewish community who believe in co-existence respectfully disagree with the idea that selective divestment is harmful to Jewish Christian relationships. My experience is totally different. The divestment work Jews, Muslims and Christians do together across religious, cultural and racial boundaries has strengthened our relationships, not weakened them. I applaud the PCUSA in their effort to institute a policy of selective divestment. May we love each other on the way toward ending occupation and establishing good relations. I pray that a sustainable peace comes quickly in our day.

Respectfully,

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*Jewish Voice for Peace: JVP.org
Fellowship of Reconciliation: forusa.org