



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Report to the Executive Council of the United Church of Christ on Implementation of General Synod 25 (2005) Resolution “Concerning the Use of Economic Leverage to Promote Peace in the Middle East” June 2013

In 2005, the United Church of Christ’s General Synod adopted the resolution “Concerning the Use of Economic Leverage to Promote Peace in the Middle East” by a vote of 529 in favor (74.6%), 168 opposed (23.7%), and 12 abstentions (1.7%). Since that time, the Covenanted Ministries of the UCC have worked to implement relevant aspects of the resolution. This report focuses on the work of the Covenanted Ministries.

The language of the resolution includes several facets of economic leverage:

[A] THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 25th General Synod call upon the Covenanted Ministries, Pension Boards, United Church Foundation, Conferences, local churches and members to use economic leverage, including, but not limited to: advocating the reallocation of US foreign aid so that the militarization of the Middle East is constrained; making positive contributions to groups and partners committed to the non-violent resolution of the conflict; challenging the practices of corporations that gain from the continuation of the conflict; and divesting from those companies that refuse to change their practices of gain from the perpetuation of violence, including the Occupation; and

[B] BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all settings of the United Church of Christ are urged to remain committed to interreligious dialogue and to participation with Jewish, Christian and Muslim partners to work for peace in Israel-Palestine; and

[C] BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 25th General Synod requests the appropriate national bodies to provide materials that may be used by all settings of the church to discern how economic leverage can be used to support the development of Palestine and Israel as two independent, secure, economically viable states; and

[D] FINALLY BE IT RESOLVED that the 25th General Synod calls upon these settings to create for and disseminate to the local churches study resources on the range of issues contributing to violence and oppression in the Middle East and ways to be involved in promoting peace.

This summary report identifies work on each of these areas in the four lettered sections (A, B, C, and D), corresponding to the “resolved” clauses of the resolution cited above.

A. “...to use economic leverage...”

In this resolved clause, four areas of action are named.

1. “advocating the reallocation of US foreign aid...”

- a. General Minister and President Geoffrey Black and WCM Executive Minister James Moos joined 13 ecumenical leaders in signing a letter to Congress on US military aid to Israel, calling for Israel to be held to the same standards of review, and for hearings to be held to determine Israel's compliance with US laws regarding foreign assistance. The letter dealt with the apparent incongruity in standards and practices, as well as process of review, between Israel and other countries around the world on US foreign aid, especially military aid, which amounts to \$3 billion annually in the case of Israel.
- b. The Oct. 5 letter to Congress has been followed up with visits to Congressional offices to discuss the issue. The executive for the Middle East and Europe in WCM/Global Ministries has participated in some of those visits, including meetings with four Senate offices and one Representative on April 25, 2013. Such meeting impress upon the Congressional representatives that the church community feels strongly in the issue, and offers an opportunity to engage in discussion. While indications have been that there is little hope for hearings on possible Israeli violation of US laws, some appreciation for raising this voice has been expressed.
- c. The 2013-14 JWM Briefing Book includes a section on US military aid to Israel, consistent with the ecumenical letter mentioned above, suggesting advocating that the US hold all countries accountable on the same standards, and to "[r]eallocate the use of your tax dollars for productive efforts to bring peace, not war, to a troubled region by increasing budgetary allocations for conflict resolution and peacebuilding...."
- d. The 2011-12 JWM Briefing Book includes an entry on Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding calling for support, among other things, for "Congressional efforts to offer foreign aid to those countries demonstrating tangible evidence of promoting and moving toward peace in the Middle East; and oppose Congressional aid packages that reward intransigence." It also asks members to "make clear your opposition to U.S. military aid to parties of the conflict."
- e. The 2009-10 JWM Briefing Book reminds readers that GS 25 called for the use of economic leverage to promote peace, and asked them to "contact your elected representatives to support a reallocation of U.S. foreign aid so that the militarization of the Middle East is constrained. The U.S. contributes nearly 50% of the military budgets of the countries of the Middle East. Such allocations could be better spent on development and peace building, rather than preparation for war."
- f. Wider Church Ministries produced a document entitled "Militarization of the Middle East and the Church's Economic Leverage," which was released on June 14, 2006, as an informational guide to US military assistance to Middle Eastern countries. It also includes advocacy suggestions.

2. "Making positive contributions..."

- a. One approach to positive contributions is positive investment. In February, 2013, a delegation led by the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, pastor of the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, and President of the Diyar Consortium there (partners of Global Ministries), came to the US to engage in a discussion with the churches. Called the Bethlehem Development Initiative, the BDI is an investment opportunity “to build [Palestinian] infra-structure and to strengthen its economy. These investments will hopefully create new job opportunities, generate income and boost the economy of Bethlehem.” WCM facilitated the presence of the Rev. John Deckenback, Conference Minister of the Central Atlantic Conference; and shared the invitation with Don Hart, President of the United Church Funds (Cheri Lovell attended); and with Michael Downs, President and Barbara Kershner Daniel, chair of the Corporate Social Responsibility committee (and member of the Wider Church Ministries Board of Directors), both of the UCC Pension Boards leadership (neither attended).
 - b. Through Global Ministries, the UCC has continued to contribute to partners and organizations seeking non-violent resolution to the conflict. In addition to long-established partners who do work contributing to a peaceful future and to the long-term rehabilitation of those who have been injured by the conflict, the UCC has established a new partnership with B’Tselem: The Israeli Human Rights Information Center in the Occupied Territories, an organization that documents violations of human rights hoping to end such violations. We also provided seed money and annual contributions to Hands of Peace, an interfaith organization in the Chicago area that brings together Israelis and Palestinians from the three faith traditions in order for them to know each other in non-polemic ways.
 - c. Wider Church Ministries released a catalogue of “Opportunities for Positive Contributions,” on June 14, 2006.
3. “challenging the practices of corporations...” and 4. “divesting from those corporations that refuse to change their practices.”
 - a. In Advent, 2012, the UCC’s Collegium of Officers issued a pastoral letter called, “Let us respond to Christ’s message of hope with justice and peace.” The letter drew attention to the occupations: Roman at the time of Jesus’ birth, and Israeli now. It focused on illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and called upon church members “to make conscious decisions not to buy products which contribute to the denial of people’s rights to livelihood, land, and property. ... avoid[ing] purchasing items” such as: Ahava Dead Sea skin care products; Sodastream home carbonation product; HP computers and peripherals and Caterpillar, among others. It also encouraged purchasing an olive tree through the Joint Advocacy Initiative of the YWCA of Palestine and YMCA of E. Jerusalem and its Keep Hope Alive program, as an alternative gift.
 - b. After the release in December, 2009 of the Palestine *Kairos* document, “A Moment of Truth,” which called for the global community to engage in

efforts to end the occupation, General Minister and President Geoffrey Black joined his Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) counterpart in issuing a “Pastoral Response,” in April, 2010. The “Pastoral Response” encouraged church members and settings to engage the Palestinian Christian call in Palestine *Kairos* in a variety of ways, including, “Commit to support denominational partners in Palestine, which supports the Palestinian economy; and to avoid products that are produced in illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank.” Such a proposed consumer boycott of settler products challenges corporate practices.

- c. Global Ministries facilitated a visit by the United Church Foundation (now United Church Funds) to Israel/Palestine in July, 2006. UCF President Don Hart and consultant Cheri Lovell participated. They experienced the current reality and met with UCC/Global Ministries’ partners as well as Palestinian and Israeli NGO representatives, many of whom have been engaged in issues of economic leverage.

B. “...to remain committed to interreligious dialogue...”

The national covenanted ministries continue to be engaged in interreligious dialogue in various settings, including with representatives of organizations from the Jewish community and the Muslim community, and seek ways to work with them to promote peace in the Middle East where possible.

1. The UCC has participated in the national Jewish-Christian Roundtable on Middle East Issues since its inception in May 2004. This Roundtable was created to provide space for the ecumenical churches and major Jewish organizations (such as the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the Jewish Council on Public Affairs, B’nai B’rith International, and others) to discuss issues related to the Middle East, and specifically, Israel/Palestine. The UCC’s Minister for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, and the executive for the Middle East and Europe, have participated in this Roundtable; the latter serves as a co-convenor.
2. The UCC is a contributing member of the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative (NILI), a Jewish-Christian-Muslim coalition that advocates for an active involvement of the US in negotiations to obtain a just and peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict. NILI has met with Administration officials, including Secretaries of State Rice and Clinton, and then-Senator John Kerry, to ensure that US government leaders know of the high priority peace in the Middle East enjoys among our churches and religious communities.
3. The UCC has been engaged with the American Muslim community since November 2007 through the National Muslim-Christian Initiative. While the NMCI has not focused heavily on issues pertaining to the Middle East, dialogue has centered on the issues of faith communities in North America, including Islamophobia.
4. Ecumenically, the executive for Middle East and Europe in WCM/Global Ministries serves on the board of directors of Churches for Middle East Peace

(CMEP), a Washington, DC-based ecumenical coalition of 22 churches that was established in 1984. Through CMEP, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and the historic Peace churches work together to promote a two-state solution, a shared Jerusalem, and resolution of attendant refugee issues.

C&D. Materials and Resources

In addition to materials and resources named above, which are posted on the Global Ministries' Middle East and Europe website (www.globalministries.org/mee), the same website has been enhanced to include the following:

- Frequent news and updates from partners and on issues pertaining to the conflict;
- Links to sources for news on Middle East issues;
- A comprehensive library of UCC resolutions related to Middle East issues, including Israel/Palestine, as well as a report from the 2009 consultation on the Middle East as mandated by the Executive Council (the report is a good resource in and of itself);
- An extensive and annotated reading list on Israel/Palestine, including books authored by our denominational partners there, as well as other countries and issues in the Middle East;
- The “Living Stones—Christians and the Middle East” resource, developed by the Rev. Betty Bailey;
- A listing, with links, of denominational partners in the Middle East, including Israel/Palestine;
- A special page of information and links for *Kairos* Palestine: A Moment of Truth;”
- A page listing opportunities for engagement in the Middle East through partners, including trips, conferences, and other ways to have a first-hand experience.

Such postings offer perspectives and opportunities for engagement and updates from partners.

In addition to this particular work, various visits to Israel and Palestine by key national UCC leadership have taken place in the past four years.

- In November and December, 2012, the Rev. Dr. James Moos, Executive Minister of Wider Church Ministries, visited Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine. During the visit to Israel/Palestine, time was spent in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Hebron. Jim saw the work of partners to promote peace and work for justice; experienced the disparity in power relations; and had a first-hand look at the context of occupation.
- As part of a WCM-sponsored trip to the Middle East in Autumn, 2011, in commemoration of the bicentennial of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the UCC's Minister for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, the Rev. Karen Georgia Thomson participated in visits to Lebanon and

- Israel/Palestine. As interfaith officer, it is important for her to be able to speak to the issues of Israel/Palestine from first-hand experience.
- General Minister and President Geoffrey Black visited Israel/Palestine in August/September, 2010. During the visit, he had extensive exposure to partners and their work, engagement with UCC/Global Ministries' mission personnel serving with partners, and political and social context.
 - Then-General Minister and President John Thomas and Ecumenical Officer Lydia Veliko made a further visit to partners in March 2009, in the context of a trip that included Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, and Germany. In Israel/Palestine, the main focus was on partners, the work that they are doing, and the context in which they are doing it. John's reflection paper is available online.
 - Conference Ministers James Antal (Massachusetts), John Deckenback (Central Atlantic), and Roddy Dunkerson (Nebraska) visited Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine in July 2008 to meet partners and to learn about the current realities faced in the different places. In Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, the focus was on the situation of Iraqi refugees and partners' responses, and in Israel/Palestine, the focus was on the ministry of partners and a familiarization with the context. These Conference Ministers also met with Jewish leadership while in Jerusalem. Revs. Antal and Deckenback remained in Jerusalem an additional ten days to participate in an ecumenical program for Christian clergy sponsored by the American Jewish Committee and the Hartman Institute.
 - In early August 2006, Cally Rogers-Witte and David Vargas visited Israel and Palestine for a condensed two-day visit, in which they engaged UCC/Global Ministries' partners, visited Global Ministries' personnel, and were exposed first-hand to the situation on the ground.
 - In November 2005, John Thomas, John Deckenback, and Lydia Veliko spent almost six full days meeting with UCC/Global Ministries' partners, Israeli government and religious leaders and citizens, and Palestinian officials and people. In that time, they were able to assess the situation on the ground, gauge the effect of the separation barrier and other policies on Palestinian life, and engage in conversation on economic leverage.

Each trip was staffed by Peter Makari, executive for the Middle East and Europe.

2009 consultation

Submitted by,
The Collegium of Officers
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