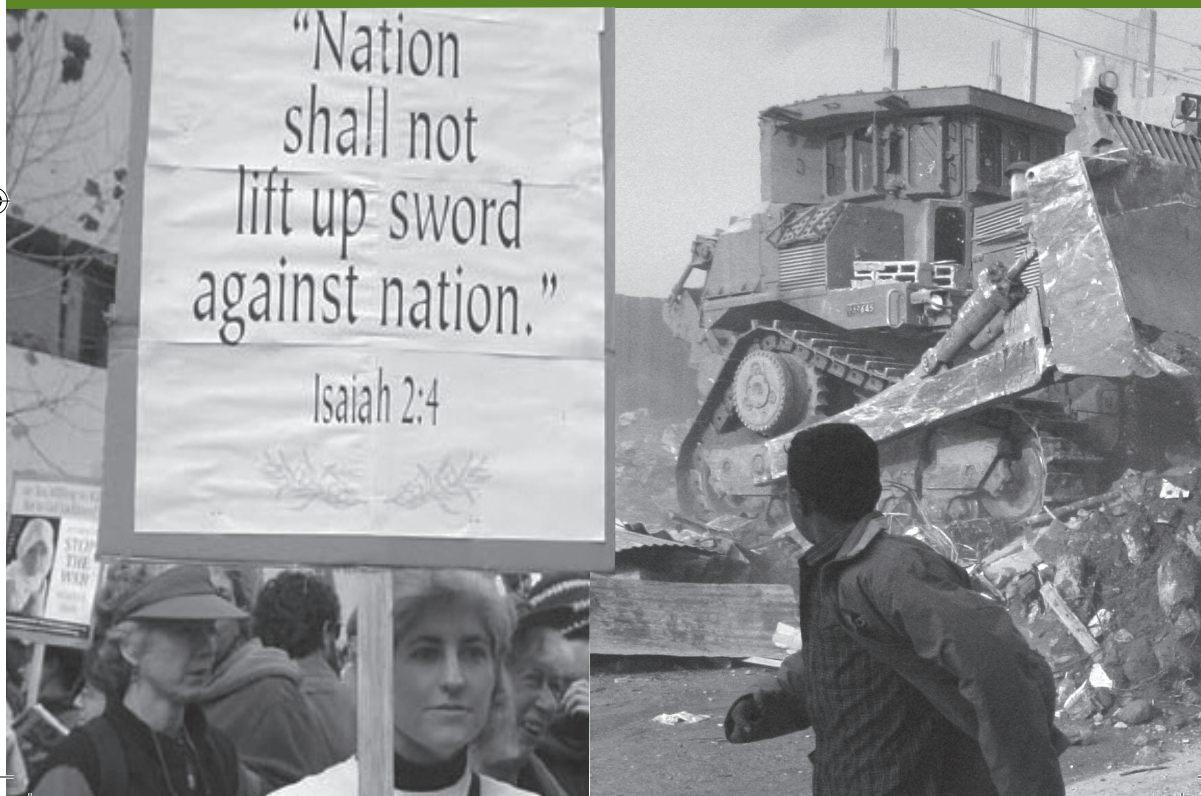




JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE

A Moral Choice:

Divesting from the Israeli Occupation



Brave Decisions

Several Christian denominations have taken brave, constructive decisions to investigate whether their churches' investments contribute to violence and oppression in Israel and Palestine. Churches are reviewing investments as a means to ending the humiliation and brutality faced by Palestinians under occupation—an occupation that causes great harm to Israeli society as well. As long as one nation occupies another, neither can enjoy true peace and security. These churches understand that investing in corporations that profit from the occupation is unethical. Examining the impact of their investments is a practical, effective way for American Christians to do good rather than cause harm.

“Seek peace and pursue it.”
Proverbs 34:14

The decision to divest from the occupation is also critically important for Jews everywhere.

The quest for justice is at the core of Jewish tradition and identity. When Jews support the Israeli occupation, we are acting from fear due to centuries of intense persecution and genocide. When the U.S. government supports the Israeli occupation in the face of international human rights violations, it is acting out of self-interests that have nothing to do with Jewish values, traditions or security. The very essence of Jewish values is a tradition of justice. We know that Jews will not be truly free or secure until the oppression of the Palestinians ends. By examining the economic underpinnings and voting to divest from companies that benefit from the Israeli occupation, Christian churches are acting as partners with Jews in our own liberation.



Facing the Backlash

Your decision to openly look at your investments is so brave in part because you are doing it in the face of being painfully and wrongfully accused of anti-Semitism. The legacy of persecution against Jews runs deep and the prejudice is real even today. Accusations of anti-Semitism should not be taken lightly, nor should they be issued carelessly.

We cannot confuse anti-Semitism with criticism of the policies of the State of Israel. No state is above criticism. It is our moral responsibility to single out injustice, to denounce it, and to act against it.

To the Jewish organizations that wield the accusation of anti-Semitism against those that speak out for justice, we ask when have you raised your voice when Israel demolishes a Palestinian home or uproots a Palestinian orchard?

The majority of American Jews have never felt so distant either from those organizations or from Israel itself. Major studies commissioned by these same organizations have found that most young American Jews feel emotionally unattached to Israel and report that peace is a higher value to them than security.¹ These same American Jews reject the idea that all Palestinians or Muslims support terrorism.² Other studies have confirmed that over two-thirds of American Jews are "disturbed by Israel's policies and actions."³

Maintaining harmony with some Jewish organizations – the Jewish Community Relations Councils, Anti-Defamation League, and American Jewish Committee – comes at the price of the values that most American Jews hold dear: **justice, equality and peace.**



Silent Majority of Jews

Because the organizations of our parents and grandparents no longer speak for us, groups including Jewish Voice for Peace are generating phenomenal support among American Jews.

Jewish Voice for Peace is one of the largest and oldest grassroots Jewish peace organizations in the U.S. We have a professional staff of six that supports 20,000 Internet activists and some 200 volunteers in ten chapters across the United States.

Our publication, *Re-framing Antisemitism*, is in its fourth printing and is used in university classes throughout the country. We dispel the myth that there is one American Jewish voice. Our Board of Advisors includes high-profile Jewish leaders, including playwright Tony Kushner, actor Ed Asner, writer Adam Hochschild, poet Adrienne Rich, and historian Howard Zinn.

In 2007, when the Zionist Organization of America spread the false accusation that Archbishop Desmond Tutu compared Israel to Hitler, Jewish Voice for Peace led a successful campaign to clear him of that charge. As a direct result of our work, major articles were written in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency and the Jewish Daily Forward exposing the scandal. Archbishop Tutu participated in our demonstration to support the Boston conference of the Palestinian ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement (Sabeel).

Jewish Voice for Peace has also worked for many years together with the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Loretto on annual shareholder resolutions challenging a U.S. corporation, Caterpillar, for its role in knowingly and willfully profiting from human rights abuses in Israel and Palestine.



Reality on the Ground

Today, in Israel and Palestine, Israel rules over 4 million Palestinians living without any kind of representation in the government that controls the most mundane details of their day-to-day lives. Every day, Palestinians encounter Israeli soldiers at hundreds of Israeli checkpoints that choke Palestinian roads. Palestinians live in fear that their homes will be destroyed at any moment, sometimes by a Caterpillar bulldozer. Israeli human rights groups say that 95% of home demolitions have nothing to do with security, but are part of a daily ritual of brutality and human rights violations.⁴ Children going to school encounter Israeli soldiers at checkpoints along the way and some days are forbidden to go to school.

Palestinians are not protected by the same rule of law that applies to Israeli Jews. Even Israelis living in illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land are protected by Israeli laws. **Palestinian lives are controlled by a government over which they have no say and which continues to destroy their homes and take their land.**

Though Israel has a right and a duty to defend itself, occupying another people by force will bring neither peace nor security and harms Israeli society as well. There is a disturbing link between the increased militarism of Israeli society, post-traumatic stress disorder amongst returning soldiers and the rise of violence against women.⁵



Investing in Occupation

CASE STUDY: Caterpillar, Inc.

According to Israeli military analyst Alon Ben-David, Caterpillar bulldozers are Israel's "key weapon."⁶ Caterpillar D9s, the most commonly used bulldozer by the Israeli military, have been used in home demolitions, destruction of agricultural land and sometimes killing civilians.⁷ The D9 is as tall as a double-decker bus and as heavy as a tank.

Since 1967, Israel has demolished more than 18,000 Palestinian homes.⁸ In the period between October 2000-December 2001 alone, 454,541 Palestinian trees were uprooted, a fact particularly devastating for a people so dependent upon agriculture.⁹ Caterpillar D9s also tore into the sewage and water networks in the Gaza Strip in 2004, causing the water supply to become contaminated.

Jewish Voice for Peace wrote to Caterpillar CEO Jim Owens in 2003 about human rights abuses being committed with D9 bulldozers.

He responded, "With regard to Israel, sales between Caterpillar and the U.S. government are openly conducted through the U.S. Foreign Military Sales Program." In other words, CAT D9s are sold as military, not construction, equipment. Human rights groups, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, have had high-level communications with Caterpillar to inform the company that its equipment is being systematically used to commit egregious human rights violations. Caterpillar still refuses to stop its sale of military bulldozers to Israel.



Divesting from the Israeli Occupation

For decades, churches have led the way in applying the nonviolent tactic of divestment to end violence against civilians all over the world. Most recently, some churches are working to divest from Sudan in an effort to end the genocide in Darfur. Now, churches face a choice about whether they will divest from the Israeli occupation.

The push to divest from Israel's occupation is not about divesting from Israel.

Instead, multi-national corporations that profit directly from Israel's occupation are being targeted. Each year, U.S. corporations receive an alarming subsidy from U.S. taxpayers. By law, 75% of U.S. military aid to Israel must be spent in American corporations. While military aid to Israel increased by 25% in 2007 to \$3 billion a year, economic aid to Israel will end in 2009.¹⁰ American corporations are now the primary beneficiaries of U.S. aid to Israel, to the detriment of Israelis and Palestinians.



Allies

"We can think of no greater act of friendship than to risk being defamed in order to remind one's friends of their own ideals when they, themselves, have forgotten them.... we believe that the day will come, be it in five years or fifty, when the Church's action in this matter [examining divestment] will be remembered with love and gratitude by Jews around the world."

Jews Against the Occupation,
New York City, 2004

Millennia of persecution have left most Jews with deep scars. Whether our relatives perished in the Holocaust or whether they suffered lesser forms of persecution and discrimination, we have been deeply affected by anti-Semitism. Unfortunately the phenomenon is alive and well throughout the world. Even if American Jews are mostly safe and secure, we often don't feel that way. We remain vigilant and ask our allies to remain alert as well. Because our wounds run so deeply, it is very difficult for Jews to recognize that Israel, not Palestinians, hold disproportionate power.

We need your help. We cannot end the Israeli occupation alone. We need our allies to stand side-by-side with us.

Jewish Voice for Peace



We provide a powerful voice for the countless Jews in this country who believe that a lasting peace in the Middle East can only come through justice for both Palestinians and Israelis.

JVP is the leading U.S. Jewish group that:

Promotes a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on universal human rights and the recognition that a solution can only be achieved through fairness to both sides.

Stood by the Presbyterian Church USA when they considered divesting from companies that profit from the occupation.

Defended New England's largest Muslim mosque from an organized smear campaign by a right-wing pro-occupation organization.

Our work has been featured in major media outlets around the world, including *the New*

York Times, Los Angeles Times, Boston Globe, Chicago Tribune, San Francisco Chronicle, Christian Science Monitor, Newsday, Le Monde, PBS Newshour, NPR's Marketplace, Israel's Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Report, ABC, NBC, Fox Network, The Nation, Al Jazeera, UK Guardian, New York Jewish Week, The Jewish Daily Forward, and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

JOIN US

Jewish Voice for Peace is a Jewish organization that counts on the support of our allies. We invite you to join us. Become a member and be an ally to Jews. Stand with us to end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

To learn more go to www.jvp.org to sign up.

References

- 1 Luntz, Frank. *Israel in the Age of Eminem*. March 2003.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Rosenberg, M.J. "Letting Israel Sell Itself," *Israel Policy Forum*. March 18, 2005. http://www.monabaker.com/pMachine/more.php?id=A2696_0_1_0_M
- 4 Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. <http://www.icahdusa.org/facts>
- 5 Shabi, Rachel. "The Fight Not to Fight," *UK Guardian*. April 17, 2006. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,329458867-103552,00.html>.
Bar-On, Dan. "Gone to Soldiers," *New Internationalist*. August, 2002. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JQP/is_2002_August/ai_90530485
- 6 Ben David, Alon. "Israel – Double Jeopardy," *Jane's Defence Weekly*. November 17, 2004.
- 7 Human Rights Watch. *Razing Rafah: Mass Home Demolitions in the Gaza Strip*. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/rafah1004/> October 2004.
- 8 Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. <http://www.18000homes.org/>
- 9 War on Want. *Caterpillar: The Alternative Report*. March 2005. www.catdestroyshomes.org/downloads/WoW_Caterpillar_Report.pdf
- 10 Erlanger, Steven. "U.S. and Israel Sign Military Aid Deal," *New York Times*. August 16, 2007.