

United Church of Christ
Seeking a just peace in the Middle East, Synod adopts economic leverage resolution

Contributed by Martin Bailey
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The use of multiple nonviolent strategies, including economic leverage, to promote peace in the Middle East were approved overwhelmingly by the 25th General Synod Tuesday morning.

As finally adopted by delegates from the UCC's 39 Conferences, the resolution calls for continued conversations with Jews, Muslims and other Christians in efforts to achieve peace in Israel and the emerging state of Palestine.

Curtis Rueter of Westminster, Colo., chair of the denomination's Wider Church Ministries board, explained that the resolution "does not target Israel but affirms the Synod's continual opposition to all violence."

The action specifically reaffirms the UCC's commitment to Israel's "safe and secure existence within internationally recognized borders" and neighboring "an independent Palestinian state."

Reuter also explained that "we seek to use various forms of economic leverage to end to all forms of violence." The UCC has used its investment portfolio to press for justice and peace on several other occasions.

According to the Rev. John H. Thomas, president and general minister of the UCC, "Our vision is of a shared future for Israel and Palestine, symbolized by the sharing of the city and holy sites of Jerusalem as a capital for both states."

The Rev. John Deckenback, Central Atlantic Conference Minister who has been involved with interreligious leaders for the denomination, had urged that a comprehensive and balanced resolution be developed. "We need to be advocates for peace, for both Israel and Palestine, using a full range of strategies," Deckenback said.

Among the economic strategies urged by General Synod include conversations -- and possibly shareholder actions -- with companies that appear to profit from conflict and violence in the Middle East. If such actions fail, church officials could decide to sell their stock (divest) in the company.

UCC-related agencies and local congregations also will be encouraged to make positive contributions to groups and partners committed to nonviolent efforts to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Thomas foresees that the UCC may invest in development projects to help build a viable Palestinian economy, as well as invest in groups in Israel and Palestine that are working for peace and against violence.

Thomas noted that the General Synod action does not call for a boycott against the State of Israel and does not call for divesting from companies doing business in Israel. He also said that the Synod "has not equated the Occupation with apartheid in South Africa."

The Synod action also recommended that church leaders and members advocate for a

reallocation of U.S. foreign aid in order to constrain what they called "the militarization of the Middle East."

The resolution that was adopted by delegates was a substitute for a proposal introduced by a delegate committee headed by the Rev. Lillian Daniel of Glen Ellyn, Ill. The substitute motion was offered by Curtis Rueter who, with Peter Makari, the Middle East and Europe executive for Wider Church Ministries, explained that the substitute included the call for continued interreligious dialogue and a more detailed description of the multiple strategies to be used.

A paragraph from the committee's resolution was added as a friendly amendment to the substitute. It provides for materials to help local congregations and other UCC organizations become involved in economic leverage to support the development of Palestine and Israel as two independent, secure and economically viable states. In 1987, the UCC affirmed its relationship to the Jewish community and insisted that God's covenant with the Jewish people remains inviolate. In 2003, the General Synod condemned anti-Semitism in all its forms.

Thomas acknowledged that conversations about several resolutions that had been submitted by local churches and conferences with leaders of the U.S. Jewish community had been intensive and at times difficult. "We have been helped by those discussions and are encouraged by the possibility of building a stronger and more honest dialogue in the future," he said.

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