

World Council of Churches –

Central Committee News Release

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WCC central committee encourages consideration of economic measures for peace in Israel/Palestine

The World Council of Churches (WCC) central committee reminded the Council's member churches that "with investment funds, they have an opportunity to use those funds responsibly in support of peaceful solutions" to the Israel/Palestine conflict.

The WCC governing body encouraged the Council's member churches "to give serious consideration to economic measures that are equitable, transparent and non-violent" as a new way to work for peace, by looking at ways to not participate economically in illegal activities related to the Israeli occupation. In that sense, the committee affirmed "economic pressure, appropriately and openly applied," as a "means of action".

As an example, the WCC governing body mentions the "process of phased, selective divestment from multinational corporations involved in the occupation" now being implemented by the Presbyterian Church (USA). "This action is commendable in both method and manner, [and] uses criteria rooted in faith."

The recommendation, approved one day before the end of the 15-22 February meeting of the Council's governing body in Geneva, is contained in a minute addressed to WCC member churches. In it, the committee also notes that "in the conflict in Israel and Palestine there is a renewal of hope, although there is not yet a reduction of the threats that separate the parties".

The document points out that "illegal activities in occupied territory continue as if a viable peace for both peoples is not a possibility", and that multinational corporations have been involved in a number of "violations of international law" within that territory.

The committee's 150 members affirm: "The concern here is to abide by law as the foundation for a just peace." "We are not blind to facts and must not be complicit in them even unwittingly."

While highlighting the "growing witness and impact of church engagement that includes both Israelis and Palestinians", including initiatives like the WCC-led Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), the committee also "urges the establishment of more and wider avenues of engagement between Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities pursuing peace".

As a frame for its recommendation, the WCC governing body recalls both its 1992 statement that "criticism of the policies of the Israeli government is not in itself anti-Jewish", and its 1969 call for "effective international guarantees for the political independence and territorial integrity of all nations in the area, including Israel". It also mentions its 2004 recognition of Israel's "serious and legitimate security concerns".

The full text of the WCC central committee minute follows:

Minute on economic measures for peace in Israel/Palestine

The Public Issues Committee proposes Actions by the Central Committee on the following issues.

The Public Issues Committee proposes the Central Committee to adopt the following minute on Israel/Palestine.

Minute on Certain Economic Measures for Peace in Israel/Palestine.

In the conflict **in Israel and Palestine** there is a renewal of hope although there is not yet a reduction of the threats that separate the parties to the conflict. Palestinians have now organized two elections with constructive effect, despite continuing occupation, and plan another at mid-year. The churches welcome that momentum is building for peace and for solutions which credibly engage those who must make peace, the powerful as well as the weak.

The churches note the growing witness and impact of church engagement that includes both Israelis and Palestinians. The WCC-led Ecumenical Accompaniment Program (EAPPI) is present and supportive of both Palestinians and Israelis who suffer under current circumstances. There is also growing interest among churches in taking new actions that demonstrate commitment to and enhance prospects for a just, equitable and lasting peace in both Israel and Palestine.

Notable among these are initiatives within churches to become better stewards of justice in economic affairs which link them to on-going violations of international law in occupied territory. The Central Committee takes note of the current action by the Presbyterian Church (USA) which has initiated a process of phased, selective divestment from multinational corporations involved in the occupation.

This action is commendable in both method and manner, uses criteria rooted in faith, and calls members to do the "things that make for peace" (Luke 19:42).

The concern here is to abide by law as the foundation for a just peace. Multinational corporations have been involved in the demolition of Palestinian homes, and are involved in the construction of settlements and settlement infrastructure on occupied territory, in building a dividing wall which is also largely inside occupied territory, and in other violations of international law being carried out beyond the internationally recognized borders of the State of Israel determined by the Armistice of 1949.

In this 38th year of occupation the desire for a just and equitable peace is growing. For churches of the WCC such hopes are guided by positions and programmes that reflect a search for truth amid much trouble.

The WCC has called, since 1969, for "effective international guarantees for the political independence and territorial integrity of all nations in the area, including Israel" and restated the concern at regular intervals, most recently in recognizing, in 2004, Israel's "serious and legitimate security concerns".

In 1992, the WCC Central Committee stated that "criticism of the policies of the Israeli government is not in itself anti-Jewish". During the Oslo peace process of the 1990s churches supported civil society projects of rapprochement between communities in conflict in the Holy Land.

In 1995, the Central Committee established criteria for economic actions in the service of justice, namely, that these must be part of a broader strategy of peacemaking, address flagrant and persistent violations, have a clear and limited purpose plus proportionality and adequate monitoring, and are carried out transparently.

In 2001, the WCC Executive Committee recommended an international boycott of goods produced in illegal settlements on occupied territory, and the WCC-related APRODEV agencies in Europe are now working to have Israeli settlement products fully and properly identified before shipment to the European Community in accordance with the terms of the EU's Association Agreement with Israel.

Yet illegal activities in occupied territory continue as if a viable peace for both peoples is not a possibility. We are not blind to facts and must not be complicit in them even unwittingly. The Central Committee, meeting in Geneva 15-22 February 2005 therefore:

encourages member churches to work for peace in new ways and to give serious consideration to economic measures that are equitable, transparent and non-violent;

persuades member churches to keep in good contact with sister churches embarking on such initiatives with a view to support and counsel one another;

urges the establishment of more and wider avenues of engagement between Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities pursuing peace;

reminds churches with investment funds that they have an opportunity to use those funds responsibly in support of peaceful solutions to conflict. Economic pressure, appropriately and openly applied, is one such means of action.