



Condemning the Vote of the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly to Engage in Divestment

30.06.2014 | Rabbi Richard A. Block, President, and Rabbi Steven Fox, Chief Executive

Statement of the Central Conference of American Rabbis

With sadness and dismay, we condemn the action of the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly, by a vote of 310-303, to “selectively divest” from three companies that it claims “further the Israeli occupation in Palestine.” Notwithstanding its claim to the contrary, the Church has now taken sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and joined the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, a contemptible effort to delegitimize the State of Israel and deny the Jewish People’s right to statehood. We do thank and commend the participants in the Assembly who voted against and nearly succeeded in defeating the wrongful and self-defeating resolution.

We are particularly outraged that the General Assembly took this step while Hamas terrorists continue to hold three innocent teenagers kidnapped for no reason other than being Jewish Israelis.

While the resolution purports to reaffirm Israel’s right to exist as a sovereign nation, it fails to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, and it hedges the affirmation with reference to unspecified “United Nations Resolutions.” This vote most closely resembles the odious 1975 United Nations resolution equating Zionism with racism. Though later revoked, it marked the emergence of the United Nations as a venue of implacable anti-Israel hostility.

The General Assembly vote was preceded by the PC(USA)’s circulation of a biased and one-sided “congregational study guide,” *Zionism Unsettled*, which blames Israel alone for the absence of peace. Invoking classic anti-Semitic stereotypes and themes, it goes on to reject the very notion of a Jewish State of Israel on theological grounds. The General Assembly’s statement that *Zionism Unsettled* does not reflect the views of PC(USA) cannot be taken seriously, since it also voted not to remove the reprehensible publication from its website, where it remains for sale, recommended as a source of “helpful guidance.”

The General Assembly vote constitutes an implicit repudiation of previously fruitful Jewish-Presbyterian cooperation. In 2004, when the General Assembly stunned the Jewish world and the Church’s own membership with a previous vote for divestment, Presbyterians and Jews, including many Reform Rabbis, came together to redouble their joint efforts at dialogue, resulting in a rejection of BDS at the 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012 General Assemblies.

During the past decade, Presbyterians, Reform Rabbis, and others have worked together toward the goal of achieving peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians, living side by side in two states for two peoples in peace, security and mutual recognition. Now, regrettably, the PC(USA) has returned to a path that prior General Assemblies repeatedly rejected. By so doing, it has also turned aside from the wide mainstream of the American Jewish community and aligned itself with a miniscule fringe element.

We reaffirm what the CCAR resolved in 2005: “We deeply deplore efforts that blame Israel for

the failure of the peace process or that seek to use economic actions against Israel, including singling out for shareholder actions or divestment, companies working in Israel. These shareholder efforts are more likely to hinder rather than advance the peace process. Israel's adversaries may interpret them as endorsing continuation of their strategies of rejectionism and terror. In addition, the one-sided nature of these actions undermines their credibility[. . .] thereby creating the perception that the sponsoring entities [in this case, the Presbyterian Church (USA)] seek to de-legitimize the very existence of the State of Israel."

This is a shameful episode for the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Rabbi Richard Block

President, Central Conference of American Rabbis

Rabbi Steven Fox

Chief Executive, Central Conference of American Rabbis

Please see also:

- Report by **The New York Times**, June 20, 2014:
[Presbyterians Vote to Divest Holdings to Pressure Israel](#)
- Statement by the **World Jewish Congress**:
[Anti-Israel vote by Presbyterian Church USA sends 'terrible signal'](#)
- Statement by the **Anti Defamation League**
[ADL Disappointed by Presbyterian Church's Decision to Support Divestment from Israel](#)
- Analysis by **Scholars for Peace in the Middle East**:
[Presbyterians take antisemitic tone with BDS resolutions; new BDS threat from anthropologists](#)

(recommended by JCR)