

A Second Version of Frequently Asked Questions about the Israel/Palestine Actions of the 217th General Assembly (2006) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

What did the 2006 General Assembly do with respect to the “phased selective divestment” action of the 216th General Assembly in 2004?

The 2006 General Assembly issued a statement that acknowledges the 2004 action “caused hurt and misunderstanding among many members of the Jewish community and within our Presbyterian communion.” It expresses grief over the pain that action caused and “accept[s] responsibility for the flaws in our process, and ask[s] for a new season of mutual understanding and dialogue.”

What about the 2004 assembly action to “initiate a process of phased, selective divestment?”

The 2006 GA directed that PC(USA) investing in Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank be “in only peaceful pursuits, and affirm that the customary corporate engagement process of the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investments [MRTI] of our denomination is the proper vehicle for achieving this goal.” This replaces the 2004 GA action to MRTI “to initiate a process of phased selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel, in accordance to General Assembly policy on social investing, and to make appropriate recommendations to the General Assembly Council for action.”

Does the 2006 General Assembly’s action rescind the divestment process?

Divestment of PC(USA) funds is always an option for the denomination to use to influence the promotion of peace and justice in the world. Specifically, MRTI will continue to engage in dialogue with the parties involved in and around Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank to urge them to support peacemaking efforts. If those efforts prove unsuccessful, MRTI may propose to a future General Assembly a recommendation to actually divest funds.

What will happen over the next two years before the next General Assembly?

MRTI will continue to engage corporations through its customary processes, including the five companies already identified, seeking to ensure that the financial investments of the PC(USA) are invested in peaceful pursuits with respect to Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank. Corporate engagement may include direct conversations with corporate leaders, proxy voting recommendations, shareholder action—all of which much be approved by the General Assembly Council prior to being implemented. Also, as a last resort, MRTI may recommend the divestment of stock holdings, a recommendation that would need to be approved by a future General Assembly prior to being put into action.

Did the 2006 General Assembly change any previous positions regarding Israel/Palestine?

The position of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) remains unchanged. The 2006 assembly continues its longstanding call for Presbyterians to work ecumenically, and on an interfaith basis, through peaceful means to:

- end all violence and terror against Palestinian and Israeli civilians
- end the occupation
- create a viable and secure Palestinian state, alongside an equally viable and secure Israeli state, both of which have a right to exist

Other elements of the PC(USA) position on Israel/Palestine include:

- a shared Jerusalem, by two peoples (Israelis and Palestinians) and three faiths (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim)
- an end to the settlements
- a two-state solution with secure, internationally recognized borders, based on the pre-1967 boundaries as directed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, and agreed to by the League of Arab Nations.

The one area in which the 2006 assembly changed existing policy regarding Israel/Palestine is with respect to Israel’s security barrier. Previous General Assemblies have spoken in “opposition to the construction of a

wall and other barriers by the State of Israel,” including the 2004 General Assembly. The 2006 assembly modified its position with respect to the separation barrier and made clear that Israel’s right to security is not being denied:

“The problem with the security wall, in 2004 and presently, is its location. The 217th General Assembly (2006) supports fair criticism of the security wall insofar as it illegally encroaches into the Palestinian territory and fails to follow the legally recognized borders of Israel since 1967 demarcated by the Green Line. To the extent that the security barrier violates Palestinian land that was not part of Israel prior to the 1967 war, the barrier should be dismantled and relocated.”

Does the PC(USA) support a two-state solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians?

Yes, this General Assembly reaffirmed previous calls for the creation of a socially, economically, geographically, and politically viable and secure Palestinian state, alongside an equally viable and secure Israeli state, both of which have a right to exist. Like previous assemblies, this one called for Israelis and Palestinians “to follow the legally recognized borders of Israel since 1967 demarcated by the Green Line.”

Was the MRTI committee given any additional guidance?

The MRTI committee was directed to ensure that its strategies for engaging corporations with regard to Israeli and Palestinian territories:

- Reflect the application of fundamental principles of justice and peace common to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism that are appropriate to the practical realities of Israeli and Palestinian societies;
- Reflect a commitment to positive outcomes;
- Reflect awareness of potential impact upon the stability, future viability, and prosperity of both the Israeli and Palestinian economies;
- Identify affirmative investment opportunities as they pertain to Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank.

Did the 2006 General Assembly call upon Presbyterians to take action?

The assembly appealed to all Presbyterians to work through peaceful means with American and Israeli Jewish, American and Palestinian Muslim, and Palestinian Christian communities and their affiliated organizations:

- for an end to all violence and terror against Palestinian and Israeli civilians;
- to end the occupation;
- toward the creation of a socially, economically, geographically, and politically viable and secure Palestinian state, alongside an equally viable and secure Israeli state, both of which have a right to exist;

The assembly also asked all Presbyterians to encourage and celebrate efforts by individual Presbyterians, congregations, and judicatories of our church to communicate directly and regularly with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities, sponsor programs likely to improve relations among Christians, Jews, and Muslims, and engage in peacemaking in the Middle East.

How will these actions be communicated?

The 2006 General Assembly instructed the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to communicate these actions to: the membership of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); the leadership of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faith bodies and denominations in the United States and the Middle East with whom the PC(USA) is in communication; Israeli and Palestinian leaders in the Middle East; the president of the United States; the vice-president of the United States; the United States secretary of state; and members of Congress.

The full action of the 217th General Assembly (2006) can be found at <http://les-pcusa.org/Item.aspx?IID=90&>.