

# Jewish org's letter warns Presbyterians divestment from occupation 'taps into our deepest fears'

Things are heating up in anticipation of the [Presbyterian Church's 220th general conference](#) at the end of the month, at which the U.S. church will debate divesting from three companies that do business in the occupation. Two letters follow. The first is from the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. It is a "[letter in hope](#)" that says that the conflict has hurt both sides. The second is a great response from Lynn Gottlieb. First the JCPA one:

Dear Friends,

We, the undersigned tens of thousands of American Jews and supporters of peace in the Middle East join 1300 rabbis from throughout our country to reach out in hope to our Presbyterian friends and neighbors. We have close relationships, deeply treasured and shaped over many years. We are partners on many social issues including fostering peace between Israelis and Palestinians. We ask you to stand shoulder to shoulder with us in rejecting the counterproductive proposal to selectively divest from certain companies whose products are used by Israel. We feel honored in our hope by the Methodist General Assembly which, after much forethought and debate, decided to oppose such divestment by a 2-1 margin.

These are our feelings. Any place in which a single human being suffers, we all suffer. We know that your concern for the Palestinian people, some of whom are your Christian sisters and brothers, comes from a deep commitment to the alleviation of human pain. There is suffering enough in the land of our common inheritance on both sides of the conflict. A just solution demands peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians. We share goals of a just and lasting peace, an end to affliction, a two-state solution, and the protection of the dignity and security of all in the Holy Land. We must marshal our efforts together to bring about this peace.

We understand and respect your calling to invest in a morally responsible manner. A policy of divestment to pressure Israel, however, runs counter to these goals. Such a one-sided approach damages the relationship between Jews and Christians that has been nurtured for decades. It promotes a lopsided assessment of the causes of and solutions to the conflict, disregarding the complex history and geopolitics. Furthermore, it shamefully paints Israel as a pariah nation, solely responsible for frustrating peace.

For Jews, the use of economic levers against the Jewish state is fraught with inescapable associations. They resonate in the Jewish consciousness with historic boycotts against Jewish companies and the State of Israel. They are experienced by Jews as part of a pattern of singling out Jews for attack. To determine and continue policies that knowingly tap into the deepest fears and pain of another is, in our tradition, a serious failure of relationship.

Divestment, and the specious Apartheid terminology that frequently accompanies it, polarizes people and communities so that the policy of divestment, and not peace, becomes the central issue. Divestment will undermine the ability of many Israelis to imagine peace. Decades of terrorism and rejection have left Israelis feeling threatened and isolated. Many of the major

proponents of divestment do not support Israel's right to exist – thus deepening this fear. Divestment as a policy is more likely to encourage those with more extreme aims than to foster reconciliation. Simply put, the bitter debate over divestment drowns out the real conversation about how to end the conflict.

At a time when politics in general have become so divisive, here and abroad, our efforts should be aimed toward reconciliation. Together and independently, Christians, Jews, and Muslims must give the parties to the conflict the confidence they need to move toward peace. There are many meaningful coexistence programs that are necessary to foster a generation of Israelis and Palestinians that will work and live side-by-side – moving past the teaching of hate and the resort to violence. As leaders of the Jewish and Protestant communities we need to deepen our understandings of the multiple narratives in the region.

We recognize the urgency of these efforts and the frustration on all sides with achieving our lofty goals. Our collective voices can play an instrumental role, working with the American government and others, to help Israeli, Palestinian, and other Middle Eastern leaders to prevent violence and attacks on civilians, support Palestinian state-building and economic development, promote positive investment opportunities, provide humanitarian aid through appropriate channels, protect existing agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and, most importantly, encourage a resumption of negotiations among the parties toward a two-state agreement that will help bring about peace, which is at the core of our traditions. We recommit to such efforts, independent of any other matter.

Yet quite honestly, were American Christian denominations to indict only Jews and Israel for the conflict with the Palestinians, they would justify the violence perpetrated against Israeli civilians – including children – as the unfortunate result of Israel's unilateral guilt. In other words, Israeli victims would be responsible for their own suffering. Frankly, such a representation is anything but an expression of friendship and common purpose, and it would replace the closeness and comfort the Jewish community feels in existing relationships with distance, distrust, and disappointment.

The Scriptures that bind us reveal that G-d created all of us in the divine image - human dignity and equality is a core value of Jewish and Christian traditions. Further, our traditions call upon us to be peacemakers. In Hebrew, the word Shalom doesn't just mean "peace" but wholeness and completeness. Peace comes about by our labors to complete the work of creation. We must work towards the day when every human is granted the dignity, security, and beneficence that is the promise of the created universe.