

Meretz USA Executive Committee Condemns Divestment

Letter (Aug. 2, 2004) protests action of General Assembly of Presbyterian Church (USA) to consider divestment from companies doing business with Israel.

<http://www.meretzusa.org/ih200501.pdf>

Dear Reverend Kirkpatrick:

We write at the direction of the Executive Committee of Meretz USA, an American organization deeply committed to the principles of peace and justice and an equitable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While we appreciate the fact that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church did not vote for a "blanket" divestment of its funds from all companies doing business with Israel, but instead to authorize the exploration of a "selective divestment of church funds from those companies whose business in Israel is found to be directly or indirectly causing harm or suffering to innocent people, Palestinian or Israeli," we believe this "clarification" attempts to whitewash a misguided, if not hostile, action.

The act of withdrawing, or threatening to withdraw, funding from businesses which, in the judgement of a lay committee, do "harm" to Palestinians or Israelis supposes that the line of causality between the business and the harm done is direct and unmediated. Yet even in the case of businesses which might provide weapons or other security-related products, two factors, at the minimum, must be acknowledged. First, that the business relationship is a product of an explicit American governmental policy in support of the security of Israel, and secondly, that the "harm" caused may be in furtherance of legitimate security and defense measures meant to protect innocent life.

We say this as both frequent critics of Israeli actions which have resulted in the death or injury of innocent Palestinian civilians and as active proponents of a full, just, and equitable resolution of the conflict leading to the end of Israeli occupation and the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state committed to living in peace with the State of Israel.

Sadly, many Israeli actions which result in the spilling of innocent Palestinian blood are directly related to Palestinian actions against innocent Israelis. While there may be a considerable imbalance between the Israeli and Palestinian capacity for harm, suicide bombings and other such acts of terror are crimes against humanity, and those who aspire to judge the actions of Israelis and Palestinians cannot avoid or equivocate on matters of such gravity. The acts of considering or implementing divestment aimed at punishing Israel, and Israel alone, exposes a profound moral imbalance. As disturbing as some Israeli policies and actions are and have been, Israel should not be subject to sledgehammer

judgements that fail to differentiate among the intricate and tangled fibers of the conflict as surely as acts against civilians of either side deliberately destroy innocent lives.

It would have been far more appropriate for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to invest in one or several of the many non-governmental organizations in Israel and the Palestinian territories which are actively trying to promote justice, relief, and reconciliation. We would be glad to recommend some to you. We ask that you share our communication with the committee which will consider the issue of divestment and let it know of our desire to share our knowledge of the brave front-line activists among Israelis and Palestinians whose missions are in the service of life.

If this committee would announce that it intends to pursue its charge along the lines we have sketched, we believe it would go a long way toward mending the harm to the cause of peace and reconciliation done by this action of the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

Harold M. Shapiro, Chair

Charney V. Bromberg, Executive Director