



SUPPORT OUR RIGHT TO BOYCOTT ISRAEL

A Statement Issued by
United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network
(UCCPIN)

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Members of Congress, on both sides of the aisle and in both the Senate and the House, have been almost feverish this year in their defense of Israel and their determination to pass resolution, H.Res. 246/S. Res. 120 which condemns and penalizes grassroots movements and churches for supporting the global boycott, divestment, sanctions (BDS) movement that aims to hold Israel accountable. While a resolution, rather than a bill which will be signed into law, H.Res.246/S.Res.120 is nonetheless designed to repress dissent and constitutes no less of a chilling infringement on First Amendment Rights, which include the right to apply economic pressure on Israel, or any country for that matter, to protect human rights and follow international law. The First Amendment protects the right to boycott, withholding financial support consistent with our values and in defense of human rights.

In 2015 the General Synod of the United Church of Christ supported the right to boycott in the case of Israel when it passed the resolution “A Call for the United Church of Christ to Take Actions toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.” This Synod resolution does not call for a blanket divestment or boycott of Israel; it is very specific. It calls for divestment from those companies which are complicit in or profit from human rights violations arising from occupation of the Palestinian Territories by the state of Israel. It also calls for the boycott of products produced in illegal Israeli settlements located in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

With this 2015 resolution, “The United Church of Christ seeks to draw attention to, and ultimately help to end, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and people,” observed Peter Makari, Executive, Middle East and Europe, Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). “Such an approach can only improve the security of Israel and of the region. And to use economic measures is consistent with our church’s non-violent engagement in many situations of injustice in the US and the world.”

To Makari’s point, the United Church of Christ has often used economic measures to express its prophetic witness. Since before the American Revolution the Congregationalists, our forbearers, understood that how we use our money has moral implications, that how we spend and invest can be a powerful instrument for human liberation or a support for oppressive policies, systems, and governments.

From Congregationalists in Colonial New England boycotting British goods to protest the British Parliament’s Townsend Acts, to boycotts of non-union grapes, bananas, lettuce, pickles, Taco Bell and Wendy’s restaurants to support just treatment and a living wage for farmworkers, the UCC has used its economic resources to leverage change. From divesting in multinational

companies making profits in apartheid South Africa in the 1980s to divesting from corporations profiting from the Occupation in Palestine and fossil fuel companies accelerating global warming in the 21st century, our members, congregations, and national ministries have sought to bear witness to a just world for all.

When the New York UCC Conference pushed back against Governor Cuomo's decision to prohibit state agencies from doing business with companies and organizations aligned with the BDS movement, they were standing in and upholding the UCC's tradition and legacy of prophetic witness. As of April 2019, 26 other states, in addition to New York, have passed anti-boycott legislation, not just threatening, but de facto eliminating First Amendment rights that protect the right to boycott. This number presents both a need and an opportunity for other UCC conferences in their respective states to follow the lead of New York, standing in witness and protest.

Given these alarming developments, we are grateful that Minnesota Representative Ilhan Omar just introduced H.Res. 496.

Her resolution affirms, as its title says, that "all Americans have the right to participate in boycotts in pursuit of civil and human rights at home and abroad, as protected by the first Amendment to the Constitution." Although the resolution does not specifically mention the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), it clearly constitutes a counterpoint to and critique of the anti-BDS resolution, H Res. 246 and the overwhelming number of representatives, 398 who voted for it, including many Democrats.

The content of Rep. Omar's resolution offers a kind of primer on our country's time-honored history of dissent. Specifically, [House Resolution 496](#) (H. Res. 496) asserts that boycotts "have been effectively used in the United States by advocates for equal rights since the Boston Tea Party and include boycotts led by civil rights activists during the 1950s and 1960s in order to advocate for racial equality, such as the Montgomery bus boycott, and promote workers' rights, such as the United Farm Workers-led boycott of table grapes."

The resolution also identifies historical moments when Americans participated in boycotts to push human rights in other countries: the boycotting of Imperial Japan during the late 1930s, the boycotting of Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1941, the boycotting of the 1980 summer Olympics in Moscow, and the boycotting of South Africa.

The text of the resolution also takes aim at legislative efforts to prohibit boycotts urging, "Congress, States, and civil rights leaders from all communities to endeavor to preserve the freedom of advocacy for all by opposing anti-boycott resolutions and legislation."

Omar's resolution started with two cosponsors: Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Rep. John Lewis (D-GA). As of the end of July, 13 more representatives have signed on as co-sponsors.

Interestingly, 8 of the current 15 co-sponsors for H.Res. 496, voted in favor of the anti-boycott H. Res. 246/S. Res. 120. Two were also co-sponsors: Rep. John Lewis (GA) and Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (CA). Rep. Lewis explained, "... as a longtime friend of Israel and also as a cosponsor of H. Res. 246, the resolution 'opposing efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel and the Global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement targeting Israel,' I want to make it very clear that I disagree strongly with the BDS movement."

The fact that representatives co-sponsored both resolutions, a seeming contradiction, points to the tension, complexity, and challenges that the right to boycott raises when applied to Israel.

On the same day that Omar introduced the resolution she [told](#) Al-Monitor, "We are introducing a resolution ... to really speak about the American values that support and believe in our ability to exercise our first amendment rights in regard to boycotting. And it is an opportunity for us to explain why it is we support a nonviolent movement, which is the BDS movement."

Hind Awad, a steering committee member of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), put out a [statement](#) on behalf of the BDS campaign regarding Res. 496:

This groundbreaking resolution will inspire human rights defenders everywhere including BDS activists for Palestinian rights. It affirms the right of all activists and people of conscience to advocate for human rights through boycotts against systems of oppression. It reassures us that progressives, including in Congress, are defending freedom of expression and the rights of oppressed communities, including Palestinians to peacefully fight for their rights. The defense of those rights is more vital in light of the rise of far-right racism and white supremacy, including Israel's decades-old apartheid regime.

In conclusion, the United Church of Christ Palestine Israel Network (PIN) encourages people to stand up for our First Amendment Right to use boycotts as a nonviolent action to affect change and that this includes using them to boycott Israel. We also encourage members of our church to learn about and live into our history on using boycotts as a tool for affecting change. Finally, based on our assessment that UN Resolutions to try to hold Israel accountable for protecting human rights and obeying international law have not proven to be effective, we believe that civil society's collective action to use boycotts, divestments, and sanctions to hold Israel accountable is just and needed.

Resources on Boycott

Articles about BDS in response to Resolutions:

Does anyone take the BDS Movement Seriously?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/29/opinion/israel-bds-movement.html/>

A response to Eric Alterman's question: 'Does anyone take BDS seriously?'

https://mondoweiss.net/2019/08/response-altermans-seriously/?utm_source=feedly&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=response-altermans-seriously/

Full equality' for Palestinian citizens poses threat to 'Jewish state,' 'NYT' reveals in BDS story

https://mondoweiss.net/2019/07/equality-palestinian-citizens/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=equality-palestinian-citizens&fbclid=IwAR11ceB5qs8Zg714ZhsCIrpWoRzVwn29CzW0fsnuXzeYQk-OJ_J8CiBojLU/

Tlaib decries Israel's 'racist policies' during Capitol Hill briefing examining abuses of US citizens

<https://mondoweiss.net/2019/07/policies-briefing-examining/>

Why Americans Should Support BDS

<https://www.thenation.com/article/bds-house-resolution-trump-squad-omar-aoc/>

John Lewis backs the right to boycott Israel — even though he opposes BDS

<https://www.jta.org/2019/07/26/politics/john-lewis-backs-the-right-to-boycott-even-though-he-opposes-bds?fbclid=IwAR3MqpsncEOjyGYHB-gEAnnJeTh2IE2pcXonC3udfqcXSkmc29NMP81xSQ>

Progressive Democrats vote against Palestinian rights <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/progressive-democrats-vote-against-palestinian-rights>

<https://palestinelegal.org/federal>

Colonial Boycott:

Boycott of British Goods in Response to the Townsend Acts, 1767

https://www.masshist.org/revolution/non_importation.php

UCC Boycotts and Divestment:

Nestle and American Home Products, Infant Formula, 1977

<http://uccfiles.com/pdf/TO-ENDORSE-TE-BOYCOTT-OF-AMERICAN-HOME-PRODUCTS-AND-TO-MONITOR-NESTLE.pdf>

Non-union Chiquita Bananas and non-Union Ice Berg Lettuce, 1979

http://d3n8a8pro7vbm.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/6068/farm-workers-20-yrs.pdf?1418430445

South Africa, 1985

<http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/PRONOUNCEMENT-ON-UCC-FULL-DIVESTMENT-OF-ALL-FINANCIAL-RESOURCES-FROM-ALL-CORPORATIONS-DOING-BUSINESS-WITH-SOUTH-AFRICA.pdf>

United Farm Workers, California Non-Union Table Grapes, 1985

<http://www.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/Support-of-the-Boycott-of-California-Table-Grapes.pdf>

Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Mt. Olive Pickles, 1999

http://d3n8a8pro7vbm.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/6066/FLOC-Mt-Olive.pdf?1418430443

Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Taco Bell, 2001

<http://uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/IN-SUPPORT-OF-THE-COALITION-OF-IMMOKALEE-WORKERS-BOYCOTT-OF-TACO-BELL.pdf>

Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Wendy's, 2016

<http://uccfiles.com/pdf/Resolution-Boycott-of-Wendys.pdf>

Ecumenical and Interfaith Initiatives:

Ecumenical Statement, 2016

https://www.globalministries.org/employing_economic_measures

Interfaith Coalition for Corporate Social Responsibility, 1971

<https://www.iccr.org/>