APPROVED as amended (subject to ratification by the UCC Board in October, 2015)

A CALL FOR THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO TAKE ACTIONS TOWARD A JUST PEACE IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Submitted by Central Atlantic Conference, Central Pacific Conference, and the New York Conference A Resolution of Witness

SUMMARY

This resolution proposes a fourfold strategy by the United Church of Christ to help end the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The strategy seeks to combine: (1) educational empowerment (study of *Kairos Palestine 2009 – 'A Moment of Truth': A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering*); (2) economic leverage (divestment from companies that profit from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and boycott of products produced in such territories by Israeli companies); (3) political pressure (petition to Congress to ensure that aid to Israel violates neither the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act nor the U.S. Arms Export Control Act); and (4) interreligious dialogue (conversation among the three Abrahamic faiths aimed at reaching religious reconciliation and achieving political resolution).

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING

This resolution is grounded in the Biblical prophetic call to do justice and the decisive embodiment of that call in Jesus Christ. It springs from the Affirmation of the 15th General Synod that the United Church of Christ is a Just Peace Church. That affirmation commits the United Church of Christ to enacting "solidarity with the poor, seeking to be present in places of oppression, poverty, and violence, and standing with the oppressed in the struggle to resist and change . . . evil." It thereby commits the United Church of Christ to be both "a community of resistance, standing against social structures comfortable with violence and injustice," and "a community of political and social engagement, in regular dialogue with the political order."

In addition, the United Church of Christ has historically stressed the importance of living out a Covenantal theology, whereby diverse autonomous organizations covenant to collaborate for the common good. Through such Covenantal relationships, the United Church of Christ partners globally with those most impacted by the continuing conflict between the Palestinians and Israel. The current list of thirteen Global Ministries Middle Eastern partners includes regional groups as well as Israeli and Palestinian groups, notably Kairos Palestine.

Informed by that Just Peace commitment and Covenantal theology, this resolution seeks to respond to the theological declaration of our Christian partners in the Middle East that we are at a Kairos moment – a special opportunity provided by the "Still Speaking God" for us individually as Christians and collectively as a church both to listen to the

Palestinian people courageously voice faith, hope, and love in the midst of their suffering and to respond with action.

Such listening and response is thoroughly in keeping with various historical (and historic!) United Church of Christ resolutions and actions concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

The United Church of Christ has affirmed the right of Israelis and Palestinians to live peacefully within internationally recognized borders.

The United Church of Christ has identified Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and the human rights abuses it has committed there to be a major source of conflict and has called for an end to settlement activity.

The United Church of Christ has a long history of effectively supporting boycotts against products produced under unjust conditions (lettuce, grapes, infant formula, etc.) and policies that produce such conditions (apartheid).

The United Church of Christ has had, since the passage of the 2005 resolution on economic leverage, a strong history of corporate engagement with companies that profit from the Occupation.

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The desired outcome is a just peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The hope is that individuals, churches, and church entities will learn of the present plight of the Palestinians, will study the history of the conflict, will examine their own consciences, and will engage in individual and institutional actions to pressure the government of Israel to end the Occupation as a step toward a just peace. At the same time, the call is to address members of our own government and ask them to ensure that U.S. aid to Israel complies with applicable U.S. laws.

Those stakeholders most directly affected are the Palestinians. The originators of the resolution, the United Church of Christ Palestine/Israel Network, have consulted with United Church of Christ's Global Ministries partner, Kairos Palestine, and with the movement that represents a wide coalition of the largest Palestinian organizations, trade unions, networks, and NGOs. Both enthusiastically support the resolution, as do Palestinian groups within the United States. Many groups in other Christian denominations and in the Jewish community also support this resolution.

The originators have also approached the two major United Church of Christ financial entities addressed by the divestment call – United Church Funds and the Pension Boards – United Church of Christ, Inc.

 The United Church of Christ Palestine/Israel Network has consulted with staff from United Church Funds and has been in dialogue with them over the past six months. In addition, a member of the United Church of Christ Palestine/Israel Network Steering Committee has been welcomed to the meetings of the Ecumenical Action Group, which has been working on corporate engagement with some of the companies named in the resolution for the past nine years. None of the American companies named has responded to shareholder pressure to disengage from its support of the Occupation. Two of the international companies have taken steps to or made announcements that they would remove their operations from the occupied territories, but they have not yet fully done so. United Church of Christ Palestine/Israel Network is committed to continued dialogue about the best way to make investment/divestment decisions and welcomes a mechanism for establishing standards by which to make such decisions in the future.

United Church of Christ Palestine/Israel Network has also attempted to dialogue with the Pension Boards – United Church of Christ, Inc. on the divestment issue. Thus far, its staff has not been willing to engage in dialogue on the topic. Its executive has stated on the basis of legal opinion that its fiduciary responsibilities do not allow it to make investment/divestment decisions in response to Synod votes. Nevertheless, it has responded to the 2005 Synod "Economic Leverage" resolution by investing in the Siraj Fund, which supports nineteen Palestinian companies. Although this is indeed a positive step in support of the Palestinian economy, it does not acknowledge Israel's complete control over that economy and all its resources as documented by the World Bank. Therefore, it cannot be viewed as an effective step toward ending the Occupation.

Finally, this resolution recognizes that members of the Jewish community with whom we have had long standing interfaith relationships are also stakeholders. It commends those relationships and calls for them to continue and expand.

ACTION STEPS

Studying the *Kairos Palestine* document individually and in church groups

Encouraging travel to the region with Global Ministries and other alternative travel groups

Sponsoring local educational conferences

Self-examining investment portfolios by individuals, churches, conferences, and national United Church of Christ entities to discern whether and how divestment may be effectuated

Working side by side with allied organizations in local communities to initiate and support boycott actions

Writing letters and petitions, as well as making visits, to members of Congress in cooperation with Justice and Witness Ministries or other peace groups

138139 Initiating or continuing interfaith dialogues at all levels

Evaluation Plan

The resolution asks the General Minister and President to provide the whole church an annual assessment on the implementation of the resolution. United Church of Christ Palestine/Israel Network will offer a report on actions in the wider church that may be of assistance in developing that assessment.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body for each of the four components addressed in the resolution (elucidated above in the section entitled Summary), with the funding to be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies (primarily the United Church Board, Global Ministries, and Justice and Witness Ministries) and the funds available to these agencies, keeping in mind that many of the actions will be taken by individuals and congregations of the United Church of Christ.

In addition, Global Ministries, the joint witness of the United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ for international peace, reconciliation, and justice, will be invaluable in implementing the resolution as it works to nurture existing partnerships in the region. Its efforts will be enhanced by the June 2015 launch of its eighteen-month Middle East Initiative.

Moreover, the United Church of Christ Palestine/Israel Network, supported by its own budget, will continue to broaden its work of educating local churches and conferences.

Taking all the aforementioned into account, it is clear that the United Church of Christ is currently well-equipped to implement easily this resolution.

PROBABILITY OF INFLUENCING SOCIAL CHANGE

With the adoption of this resolution, the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ will secure its rightful place alongside other denominations and peace-seeking groups in the United States and around the world that are taking a public stand against the occupation of Palestinian territories by the Israeli government while promoting the human rights of the Palestinians and opposing the use of violence by either party.

 The unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict is of world-wide concern and has the potential to influence many other issues, including the safety of U.S. citizens here and abroad. The United Church of Christ has not addressed this conflict via resolution since 2005; yet, political realities have changed drastically in the interim. Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories has become increasingly entrenched; settlements have grown exponentially; four massive attacks have been carried out on Gaza; and several attempts at the "peace process" have failed to resolve the conflict. Frustration with the lack of progress has contributed to escalating violence from both sides.

Meanwhile, Palestinian Christians have issued their *Kairos Palestine 2009* – "A Moment of Truth" document, and Palestinian civil society has endorsed a movement calling for boycott, divestment, and sanctions. That movement is now world-wide and has achieved some notable successes, particularly in Europe but also in the U.S., including the loss of \$26 million in contracts by Veolia, the divestment from Israeli banks by European banks and pension funds, and the loss of revenue by SodaStream. Recently, Kuwait announced the termination of contracts with companies complicit in the Occupation and Sweden recognized the State of Palestine. In addition, most of the mainline Protestant denominations in the U.S. have been considering resolutions that call for some form of boycott and/or divestment. Indeed, local Presbyteries, Episcopal Dioceses, and Methodist Conferences have voted to boycott or divest. Most notably, the Presbyterian General Assembly voted in 2014 to divest from three companies.

By approving this resolution with its clear, unequivocal call for specific actions toward ending the occupation of Palestinian territories, the United Church of Christ can offer a sign of hope to the Palestinians and add its weight to a world-wide movement toward a just peace in the region.

United Church of Christ Palestine/Israel Network has been presenting workshops and study sessions on this issue in local churches, associations, and conferences since its inception in January 2012 and will continue to do so. The consideration of this resolution in five United Church of Christ conferences and its acceptance as a study document in two more conferences have led to an enormous amount of discussion and education in those conferences. Without a resolution with specific action components, such engagement would not have occurred. The consideration of the resolution by the Synod opens this conversation to the wider United Church of Christ.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

The psalmist celebrates, "How good it is when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity." (Psalm 133) Yet today the Middle East is torn by disunity between Semitic brothers and sisters separated by "dividing walls of hostility." (Ephesians 2:14) We hear the call of the prophet Micah, "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8) - and we are

reminded that we must conduct ourselves with kindness and humility even as we seek to counteract injustice anywhere and to stand in solidarity with its victims everywhere.

As disciples of Jesus, we hear and seek to heed his call to be peacemakers: responding to violence with non-violence and extending love to all. In the words of the *Kairos Palestine* document, "True Christian theology is a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed, a call to justice and equality among peoples." (*Kairos Palestine 2009 – "A Moment of Truth"*)ⁱ

THEREFORE, in the spirit of the witness of the psalmist and ancient prophets and of the ministry of Jesus the Christ, we offer this resolution.

WHEREAS, in 1985 the 15th General Synod of the United Church of Christ committed itself to be a Just Peace Church;ⁱⁱ

WHEREAS, historically the United Church of Christ has affirmed Israel's right to exist within secure and internationally recognized boundaries (GS 16[1987] iii and GS 18[1991] and asserted the rights of Palestinians to enjoy sovereignty in an independent, contiguous, and viable state of their own, within secure and recognized boundaries (GS 16 [1987], GS 17[1989], and GS 18[1991];

WHEREAS, past General Synods have identified the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and its human rights abuses committed therein to be a major source of conflict and have called for the end of the construction and expansion of settlements (GS 18 [1991] and GS 21[1997]^{vi});

WHEREAS, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ have a long history of effectively using boycotts against products and policies (lettuce, grapes, infant formula, apartheid, etc.) to address injustices;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ is deeply committed to interfaith relationships and General Synods have confessed to the sin of anti-Semitism and proclaimed its renunciation (GS 23 [2001])^{vii} and have denounced actions against Islam or Muslims based on ignorance or fear (GS 28 [2011]);^{viii}

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has historically stressed the importance of living out a Covenantal theology, whereby diverse autonomous organizations covenant to collaborate for the common good, and that through such Covenantal relationships the United Church of Christ has partnered globally with those most impacted by the continuing conflict between Palestinians and Israel;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ recognizes the complexity of the conflict and that it has caused suffering for both Palestinians and Israelis;

WHEREAS, as demonstrated through ongoing dialogue and partnerships, the United Church of Christ values and nurtures its relationships with Jewish groups in the U.S. and

Israel who seek justice, equality, and freedom for both peoples, including groups with differing perspectives on the conflict;

WHEREAS, Palestinians in the West Bank have lived since 1967 under Israeli military occupation that subjects them to many human rights abuses, including: loss of their land for the purpose of building Israeli settlements; limited access to their land and to each other on account of the route of the Separation Wall on occupied Palestinian territories; systematic displacement into small, non-contiguous geographic enclaves separated by barriers and checkpoints; gross inequality in the amount of water allocated to them; severe and arbitrary travel restrictions; limited access to holy sites; segregated roads; demolition of their homes; destruction of their crops by settlers and the Israeli army; and arbitrary arrest, even of children; ix

WHEREAS, the Israeli government has once again subjected Palestinians in Gaza to military attacks using deadly force beyond that necessary for Israel's acknowledged need for self-defense and thereby beyond that measure of proportionate response permitted by historically Christian just war theory, ^x has destroyed Gaza's infrastructure and economy, and has imposed: severe limits on personal entry and on the entry of products essential to Gazans' well-being; fishing limits in violation of international law and the Oslo accords; and strict control of electronic communications, as well as of air and sea space; ^{xi}

WHEREAS, Israel has annexed Palestinian East Jerusalem and separated it from the West Bank and Gaza and continues to appropriate Palestinian properties there for Jewish settlements and to deny building permits to Palestinians, as well as to revoke the residency rights of many of its Palestinian citizens there; xii

 WHEREAS, Israel refuses to end, but rather has sought to solidify, its occupation of territory conquered in the 1967 War, leading to numerous illegal actions and human rights abuses by the Israeli government and military in defiance of United Nations resolutions, xiii and refuses to respect the 4th Geneva Convention as called for by the International Court of Justice in its opinion concerning the Separation Wall in the occupied Palestinian territories; xiv

WHEREAS, our Palestinian Christian partners, seeking an alternative to violence born of hopelessness and despair, have authored *Kairos Palestine 2009 - 'A Moment of Truth'*: *A Word of Faith, Hope, and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* as a call and summons to their global partners to engage in non-violent measures that will pressure Israel to end the Occupation;^{xv}

WHEREAS, the resolution "Concerning the Use of Economic Leverage in Promoting Peace in the Middle East," passed by the General Synod in 2005, calls upon "the Covenanted Ministries, Pension Boards, United Church Foundation, local churches and members to use economic leverage, including, but not limited to: advocating the reallocation of US foreign aid so that the militarization of the Middle East is constrained; making positive contributions to groups and partners committed to the non-violent resolution of the conflict; challenging the practices of corporations that gain from the

continuation of the conflict; and divesting from those companies that refuse to change their practice of gain from the perpetuation of violence, including the Occupation"; vi

WHEREAS, despite years of corporate engagement and the submission of shareholder resolutions from United Church Funds^{xvii} and other religious and secular groups, few companies have withdrawn any of their operations that support the Occupation;

WHEREAS, many agencies, institutions, universities, and Christian denominations around the world are severing financial ties to companies or institutions that help sustain the Israeli occupation and now, notably, have been joined by various Jewish groups in the U.S., such as Jewish Voice for Peace^{xviii} and American Jews for a Just Peace-Boston, ^{xix} as well as Israeli groups, such as the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions^{xx} and Coalition of Women for Peace, ^{xxi} that support using boycott and divestment strategies; and

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ's efforts to end the Occupation through economic leverage and advocacy for the protection of human rights of all Palestinians and Israelis are not aimed at isolating Israel or any other party but reflect the belief that engagement and communication among all affected by the current tragic situation in the Middle East are in the deepest interests of both Palestinians and Israelis;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ:

CALLS upon United Church of Christ churches and church members to study thoughtfully the *Kairos Palestine* document, as well as other perspectives on the occupied Palestinian territories, to reflect upon the theological truths within the *Kairos Palestine* document, and to take heed of its call for non-violent measures pressuring Israel to end the occupation in solidarity with the Palestinian people suffering under occupation;

CALLS upon the United Church of Christ Board, the Pension Boards – United Church of Christ, Inc., United Church Funds, conferences, local churches, members, and other related United Church of Christ entities to divest any direct or substantive indirect holdings in companies profiting from or complicit in human rights violations arising from the occupation of the Palestinian Territories by the state of Israel, including, but not limited to, Caterpillar, Inc., Motorola Solutions, Hewlett-Packard Company, G4S, and Veolia Environmental and its subsidiaries until such time as these companies no longer profit from or are complicit in said human rights violations;

URGES the United Church of Christ Board, soliciting input from stakeholders in this issue, to develop and publish standards by which faith-driven investment, divestment, and re-investment decisions will be made in the future;

CALLS upon all entities of the United Church of Christ to boycott goods identified as produced in or using the facilities of illegal settlements located in the occupied

Palestinian territories, including, but not limited to, Ahava skin care products,
SodaStream products, and Hadiklaim dates, and upon church members to join boycotts of
such goods in their local communities; and for such boycotts to end when these
companies cease operations in the illegal settlements;

CALLS upon the United Church of Christ Officers and church members to persist in the request to Congress, previously made by a number of religious leaders, to ensure that the U.S. aid to Israel violates neither the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act, which prohibits assistance to any country that engages in a consistent pattern of human rights violations nor the U.S. Arms Export Control Act, which limits the use of U.S. weapons to "internal security" or "legitimate self-defense",

COMMENDS United Church of Christ leadership for continuing to dialogue with major Jewish organizations and call for United Church of Christ-wide participation in a rigorous dialogue among the three Abrahamic faiths at all levels – in particular between local congregations – that will be resourced with materials from the Wider Church Global Ministries Middle East and Europe office in order to identify ways in which groups of congregations of different faiths can work in concert to promote sacred reconciliation among all people who are affected by the conflict in the Middle East and to influence public policies in ways that will promote peace and social justice for Palestinians and Israelis and end violence in all its forms;

CALLS upon the United Church of Christ Board to monitor the implementation of this resolution by all United Church of Christ national entities and to urge that those who manage the United Church of Christ Board's own invested funds and who provide United Church of Christ Board employee health and pension benefits be in compliance with this resolution; and

ASKS the General Minister and President to provide an annual report to the whole church on the implementation of this resolution, including a summary of interfaith dialogue at various levels, along with examples of interfaith, congregation-to-congregation peace efforts.

FUNDING

The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

i http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf.

- ^v "The Middle East," http://globalministries.org/mee/resolutions/ucc-resolutions-related-to-israelpalestine/1989-mid-east-resolution.html.
- vi "Palestine/Israel," http://globalministries.org/mee/resolutions/ucc-resolutions-related-to-israelpalestine/1997-palestine-israel-resol.html.
- vii Minutes of the Twenty-third General Synod, "*Resolution: Anti-Semitism*," pp. 11-12, http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/synod/gs23.pdf.

- ix Annual Report, B'Tselem, "Human Rights in the Occupied Territories 2011," http://www.btselem.org/annual_report_2011 and UN Human Rights Council Session 12, "Human Rights in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories," http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/12session/A-HRC-12-48.pdf.
- x As John Hickox has observed, "The most recent episode of Israel's bi-annual atrocities in Gaza has faded from the news. How can that be? An estimated 2106 citizens of Gaza were killed! Israel admits that 'as many as 72% were civilians.' That means that 1516 non-Hamas men, women, children and babies were killed by rockets and bombs launched from American-made Apache helicopters and F-16 jets." http://cpcjusticeandwitness.com/2014/09/23/where-did-it-all-begin/ Given that Israel is reported to have lost just sixty-seven of its soldiers and only six of its civilians in the recent conflict, there can be little doubt that its response did not meet the just war principle of proportionate use of force. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29503439.

xiii http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/study-israel-leads-in-ignoring-security-council-resolutions-1.31971 and http://www.ifamericansknew.org/stat/un.html.

[&]quot;General Synod pronouncement and proposal for action on the United Church of Christ as a 'Just Peace Church," //www.ucc.org/beliefs/theology/general-synod-pronouncement.html.

[&]quot;The Israeli Palestinian Conflict," http://globalministries.org/mee/resolutions/ucc-resolutions-related-to-israelpalestine/1987-ip-resolution.html.

[&]quot;Consequences of the Persian Gulf War for a Just Peace Church," http://globalministries.org/mee/resolutions/ucc-resolutions-related-to-israelpalestine/1991-gulf-war-resolution.html.

viii http://uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/Resolution-On-Actions-of-Hostility-Against-Islam.pdf (2011).

xi http://www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/.

xii "Background on East Jerusalem," B'Tselem, www.btselem.org/jerusalem.

Advisory Opinion, International Court of Justice, 9 July 2004, "Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?pr=71&code=mwp&p1=3&p2=4&p3=6.

http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf.

http://globalministries.org/mee/resolutions/ucc-resolutions-related-to-israelpalestine/2005-economic-leverage.html.

United Church Funds, "*UCF Mideast Engagements*," http://ucfunds.org/social-responsibility/corporate-engagements/.

www.jvp.org.

www.ajjpboston.org.

xx http://icahdusa.org/an-open-letter-from-jeff-halper/.

http://www.coalitionofwomen.org/.