

# WORDS MATTER:

## *Criticism of Israeli policies and charges of anti-Semitism*

The Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA) condemns all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. There is no room for such hatred in our society today.

History has shown that Jewish people have been persecuted and subjected to genocidal actions because of their religious identity. Christianity has been, and in some cases continues to be, a major culprit because of heresies that condemn Jews (along with peoples of other religious faiths) who do not convert to faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, one of the great ironies in the ongoing political debate about Israel is Christian Zionism (see here for full definition: <http://bit.ly/defineCZ>) which supports a Jewish state today, but presumes a very anti-Semitic eschatology. For a good study of Christian Zionism, refer to *Zionism Unsettled*, published by this network and available at our website: [theIPMN.org](http://theIPMN.org).

Since June 2014 there has been a good deal of conversation about the Presbyterian policy of divestment from three U.S. companies (Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola Solutions) that profit from non-peaceful pursuits in Palestine. Because many people blur the lines between Judaism, Zionism and Israel, and use the label “anti-Semitic” to shut down debate, we offer the following definitions and observations on these terms as basic tools for Presbyterians (and others) to use in constructive dialogue:

**Jewish** — a person of faith from Judaic tradition, or denoting a person of culture or ethnicity rooted in Judaism.

**Israeli** — a person who is a citizen of Israel. Not all Israelis are Jewish, and not all Jews are Israeli. Israel’s population is over 20% non-Jewish.

**Zionism** — A political ideology often attributed to Theodore Herzl that sees Judaism, and all Jewish people around the world, as a nation rather than as a religious or cultural affiliation. Zionists have many different opinions about the modern State of Israel, and many different political approaches to the question of Palestine. Not all Zionists are Jewish and not all Jews are Zionists.

**Anti-Semitism** — Though Arabs are Semitic people, this term has come to refer to hostility and prejudice specifically against Jews. Anti-semitism is a cultural system that consists of stereotypes of, misinformation about, and mistreatment of, Jewish people. The system of anti-semitism may use Jewish people as agents of oppression, by blaming other kinds of oppression - like racism, classism, and Islamophobia - on some inherent quality of Judaism or Jewish people. Those seeking to maintain the status quo of the Israeli occupation of Palestine are unjustifiably equating advocating for justice for Palestinians with anti-Semitism.

Since Semitic peoples cannot be called “anti-Semitic,” a new label has been invented for criticism of Israeli policies by Jews who are being called “self-hating Jews,” which illustrates that the divisions are based on ideology not ethnicity. Members of groups such as Jewish Voice for Peace, T’ruah (formerly Rabbis for Human Rights), and Open Hillel have been mercilessly labeled “self-hating Jews” for purely ideological reasons.

### **BDS and Presbyterian Policy:**

Actions of Presbyterian General Assemblies and our policies regarding BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions):

- The 219th General Assembly (2010) called for “the allocation of U.S. military aid funds to be contingent on compliance with [U.S. laws]” and “express its extreme disappointment with the U.S. government that while the State of Israel has been found not to comply with [U.S. statutes], it continues to be the recipient of U.S. military aid.” This policy enabled our PC(USA) Stated Clerk to sign a letter with leaders of 15 Christian denominations sent to Congress calling for the suspension of such aid. (i.e. **sanctions**)
- The 220th General Assembly (2012) voted to **boycott** all goods manufactured in illegal Israeli settlements.
- The 221st General Assembly (2014) voted to **divest** from three U.S. companies that profit from “non-peaceful pursuits” in the illegal occupation of Palestine.

The PC(USA) still invests in dozens of companies that do business in Israel but are not profiting from non-peaceful pursuits. The PC(USA) boycotts only products made in Israeli settlements and not products from Israel. In regard to all three above decisions, even while our motivation is to achieve justice in Palestine, the most important witness we make as a church is that we simply do not invest the resources God has given us in ways that violate human rights or add to the oppression and collective punishment of a whole people.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is blessed with a system of governance which allows all voices to be heard. Inevitably this means different views and opinions are expressed. Presbyterians have always prided themselves in making sure that our debate is accurately informed and transparent. The same process was followed for these votes as for marriage equality and all other decisions. The military aid overture in 2010 passed with a voice vote, and the boycott overture passed with a 71% majority. The closeness of votes on divestment (three vote margin against in 2012, seven vote margin in favor in 2014) demonstrates that Presbyterians have been seriously divided on the best witness to be made with denominational assets. The best way to combat divisions is to understand the facts, which until recently has not been easy because the Palestinian narrative is just now becoming known.

Through the work of our network, the denomination’s largest mission network (among almost 50 networks), The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) partners with both Christian and Muslim Palestinians who are committed to non-violent, peaceful solutions for seemingly intractable problems. IPMN is a true grassroots network, with Presbyterians from all walks of life, and Presbyterian Palestinians who know personally the pain of having been ethnically cleansed from their homes. IPMN has important partnerships with both American and Israeli Jewish peace and justice groups who say as Jews that their call is to stand for justice for oppressed peoples, especially the Palestinians.

Next time you hear charges of anti-Semitism leveled at those who are committed to non-violence, peace and justice for all people in the region, please give deep thought and prayer to the attack and the motivation for such defamation.