

23. Boycotts Divestments Sanctions - Notice of Motion 201

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Resolutions	As set out at the end of the Report.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	The report outlines the Council's response to the Briefing document on the pros and cons of the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement as requested by Notice of Motion 201.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	A briefing document for the Methodist people on the arguments for and against the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement. Report 14 to the 2010 Conference <i>Justice for Palestine and Israel</i> . Previous Conference Resolutions on Israel and Palestine can be found on the Israel/Palestine page of the Methodist Church website. The Israel/Palestine Working Group was established by the 2009 Methodist Conference (NoM 226) and directed to bring a report to the Conference in 2010. A proposal for this work was brought before the Methodist Council in September 2009 (MC/09/80).

The 2013 Conference passed the following motion:

Recognising the call of the prophet Micah to "do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God," the Conference directs the Methodist Council to ensure that the Joint Public Issues Team prepare a briefing document for the Methodist People upon the arguments for and against the Boycott Disinvestment Sanctions Movement, and for the Methodist Council to bring a report based upon the briefing to the Conference of 2014.

Introduction

1. The work requested by the Conference was undertaken by the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) on behalf of the Council during September to December 2013. An initial project plan was created and three specific actions were identified by JPIT at the outset, these were:
 - a. The creation of an on-line questionnaire to hear from a variety of voices on this subject;
 - b. The gathering of a 'reference group' which would offer advice to JPIT as they wrote the report;
 - c. A visit to the region by JPIT, facilitated by the International Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem, to speak with a wide variety of people involved.
2. It was hoped that by undertaking the work in this way it would be possible to produce a briefing which outlined arguments for and against the BDS movement as directed by the Notice of Motion.

3. The response to the consultation was, as expected, very high. There were 2,500 responses received (from individuals or organisations) of which 200 were from Methodists. To help reflect on the consultation a Reference Group was created with advice from the President. We are grateful for the support of the Reference Group in helping to process and read these responses as well as to all those who engaged with this consultation. Among the responses are several that offer valuable and insightful perspectives including a few from across the spectrum that provide personal testimonies of the trauma experienced by respondents or their families.
4. We are very grateful to all those who took time to engage constructively with this consultation and aided the development of the production of the briefing document.

The Briefing

5. The Notice of Motion asks that the briefing document is prepared for the Methodist people. The Council approved the Briefing for release just after Easter through the Methodist website. It was then for District Leadership Teams to decide how to make the report, and other church position papers, available to those without web access.

Report to the Conference

6. Having discussed the Briefing, and heard from those involved, the sensitivity and passion that surrounds this topic is self evident. Since the Notice of Motion was passed, the increase in the workload for members of the Connexional Team has been substantial, as has the call on the time of the President to address those with concerns outside of the Church. This increase in resource allocation should not go unnoticed in a schedule of work which is already stretched to full capacity. None of this diminishes the importance of this issue, especially given the long-held conviction of the Methodist people that our faith calls us to be active in the world, working for justice and peace. It does however need the Church to recognise the limitations of resources and personnel. It is also important for the Church to be aware of the lobbying that has occurred around this issue which has placed members of the Presidency and the Team in receipt of very challenging communications.
7. The Council felt that it was important for the Methodist people to be aware of previous thoughts, work and communications of the Methodist Church concerning Israel and Palestine. The following (which are all available on the Methodist Church website) provide a summary of the position:
 - (i) Our abhorrence of anti-Semitism and all that it leads to;
 - (ii) Our desire to have justice for both Israel and Palestine as outlined in the 2010 Conference report;
 - (iii) Our recognition of the State of Israel and its right to security, land, and nationhood;
 - (iv) Our conviction of the rights of Palestinians to live freely within their own state without fear or restriction;
 - (v) Our continued call for the return of Israel to the 1967 borders, encouragement of members to continue to boycott products from illegal settlements and for a negotiated solution offering security, peace and well-being for all in the region.
8. Having considered the issues at stake which the Briefing presents, the following are offered by the Council as additional resolutions for the Conference:

- a) The BDS Briefing is commended to the Methodist people for study, reflection and prayer either as individuals or with others.
- b) In order to give the Methodist people the time and space to undertake a period of study, prayer and reflection the Conference directs that notices of motion or memorials on this, or similar issues relating to Israel/Palestine that require further work or action will not be considered at the 2014 Conference.
- c) The Conference, mindful of the demands made by this work upon the Connexional Team and the resources of the whole Church, encourages the Methodist people to observe a period of two years (Conferences of 2015 and 2016) before submitting memorials or notices of motion to the Conference on this or similar issues relating to Israel/Palestine that require further work or action.
- d) Recognising that significant time and energy has been expended on this work beyond what is sustainable for the Church, the Conference directs the Methodist people to the resolutions of the Methodist Conference in 2010 (see Appendix 1). This will offer to the Church a variety of ways in which people might engage prayerfully and practically with the region.
- e) We wish to continue in dialogue with those in Britain who are closely affected by the ongoing conflict. In particular we would wish to call on Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) to act as an agent for the Churches in drawing together the wide range of voices from within faith communities in Britain as well as continuing to work with a variety of relevant agencies (including Forum for Discussion on Israel/Palestine (FODIP), Council for Christians and Jews, the Christian Muslim Forum).
- f) While not denying that divestment might have a place we recommend that the Methodist people take pro-active action in the region by engaging in projects and programmes that improve livelihoods and encourage greater interaction between divided communities through promoting peace.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 23/1. The Conference received the report.**
- 23/2. The Conference commended the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Briefing to the Methodist people for study, reflection and prayer either as individuals or with others.**
- 23/3. The Conference directed that, in order to give the Methodist people the time and space to undertake a period of study, prayer and reflection, notices of motion or memorials on this, or similar issues relating to Israel/Palestine that require further work or action will not be considered at the 2014 Conference.**
- 23/4. The Conference, mindful of the demands made by this work upon the Connexional Team and the resources of the whole Church, encouraged the Methodist people to observe a period of two years (Conferences of 2015 and 2016) before submitting memorials or notices of motion to the Conference on this or similar issues relating to Israel/Palestine that require further work or action.**
- 23/5. The Conference, recognising that significant time and energy had been expended on this work beyond what is sustainable for the Church, directed the Methodist people to the**

resolutions of the Methodist Conference in 2010 (see Appendix 1). This would offer to the Church a variety of ways in which people might engage prayerfully and practically with the region.

- 23/6. The Conference wished to continue in dialogue with those in Britain who are closely affected by the ongoing conflict and called on Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) to act as an agent for the Churches in drawing together the wide range of voices from within faith communities in Britain as well as continuing to work with a variety of relevant agencies (including Forum for Discussion on Israel/Palestine (FODIP), Council for Christians and Jews, the Christian Muslim Forum, EAPPI, ICAHD UK and Kairos Britain).**
- 23/7. The Conference, while not denying that divestment might have a place, recommended that the Methodist people take pro-active action in the region by engaging in projects and programmes that improve livelihoods and encourage greater interaction between divided communities through promoting justice and peace.**

Appendix 1 – Resolutions passed by the 2010 Conference

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 14/1.** The Methodist Conference received the report Justice for Palestine and Israel.
- 14/2.** The Methodist Conference adopted the Affirmation in 7.4.1 as its reply to NOM 226 (2009) "Israel/Palestine Working Group"
- 14/3.** The Methodist Conference commended the report for reflection and action in Local Churches, Circuits and Districts.
- 14/4.** The Methodist Conference affirmed and restated its support for
 - a) the vital work of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), encourages Methodists to volunteer for the programme and asks Churches, Circuits and Districts to make use of the experience of returning participants;
 - b) Christian Aid and other aid agencies working amongst Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and elsewhere in the region;
 - c) Israelis and Palestinians in all organisations working for justice and peace in the area.
- 14/5.** The Methodist Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee to undertake further work on the theological issues, including Christian Zionism, raised in the report that are needed to guide and support the approach of the Methodist Church to the Israeli/Palestinian situation and to bring a report to Conference.
- 14/6.** The Methodist Conference directed the Connexional Team to resource Churches, Circuits and Districts in their understanding of and engagement with the issues involved by:
 - a) providing information on the networks through which they can keep up to date with developments in the Israeli/Palestinian situation;
 - b) making available study materials covering the present situation to include the witness and teaching of Palestinian Christians especially that contained in the Kairos document produced by Palestinian Christian leaders in December 2009;
 - c) encouraging support for educational events around the Connexion.
- 14/7.** The Methodist Conference directed the Connexional Team to make appropriate representations to the UK Government and the European Commission calling for action to bring to an end the Occupation and the siege of Gaza and for further Government pressure to be applied to allow a process of serious peacemaking to take place that eschews violent conflict.
- 14/8.** The Methodist Conference encouraged
 - a) Districts, Circuits and Churches to support the World Council of Churches week of prayer and action for a just peace in Israel/Palestine at the beginning of June each year and also endorse the Just Peace for Palestine initiative of the Amos Trust.
 - b) the Methodist people:
 - i. to write to their MPs, MEPs and Government ministers to call for urgent help to be given to those who are suffering as a result of the Occupation;
 - ii. to visit the region of Israel/Palestine with those agencies which will help enable them to meet and engage with Palestinian Christians;
 - iii. to engage in respectful dialogue with Jews and Muslims on this issue.

- 14/9. The Methodist Conference noted the call of the World Council of Churches in 2009 for an international boycott of settlement produce and services and the support given for such a boycott by Christian leaders in Palestine in the “Kairos” document, Palestinian civil society and a growing number of Jewish organisations both inside Israel and worldwide and called on the Methodist people to support and engage with this boycott of Israeli goods emanating from illegal settlements.
- 14/10. The Methodist Conference directed the Methodist Council and the Connexional Team, as a matter of urgency, to consider and develop further ways in which the Methodist Church of Great Britain and its people, in conjunction with both ecumenical, inter-faith and other interested groups, can work for an end to the Occupation, an end to the blockade of Gaza, adherence to international law by all sides and a just peace for all in the region.
- 14/11. The Methodist Conference commended all the peoples of the region to the loving care of Almighty God and urged the Methodist people to engage in regular, informed prayer for the needs of the Land of the Holy One.