

Presbyterians target Caterpillar for divestment

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(RNS) A Presbyterian Church (USA) committee will recommend that the church add heavy equipment giant Caterpillar to its divestment list because the company profits from the "non-peaceful" use of its products by Israel against Palestinians.

According to the PCUSA, Caterpillar equipment has been used to demolish Palestinian homes and construct settlements and Israeli-only roads in Palestinian communities. These acts, according to the church committee, are illegal under international law.

Corporate engagement efforts "have not produced any substantive change in company policies or practices, and there is little reason for hope they will do so in the future," said committee chair the Rev. Brian Ellison. "We have little choice but to recommend divestment."

The church committee will present its recommendations to PCUSA's General Assembly in July 2012. If approved, no church resources could be invested in Caterpillar. According to the church's website, 24 companies are now on its divestment list for their involvement in "military-related production" or tobacco.

The American Jewish Committee called the PCUSA committee's recommendations a misguided endeavor that will harm, rather than advance, efforts to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Caterpillar has said that it cannot be expected to monitor how all of its products are used and noted that machines in question are not sold directly to Israel, but are issued through the U.S. government's Foreign Military Sales program.

The PCUSA committee is also recommending that the church add Motorola Solutions and Hewlett-Packard to the divestment list because, according to the committee, Israel also uses the companies' technologies for "non-peaceful pursuits."

Hewlett-Packard declined comment and Motorola Solutions did not respond immediately to an inquiry.