

UMC rejects call to divest from firms selling to Israel

by [Daniel Burke](#) in the [May 30, 2012](#) issue

At their General Conference, United Methodists twice rejected resolutions that called for the denomination to divest from companies accused of contributing to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. About two-thirds of the nearly 1,000 delegates rejected the calls for divestment. The UMC rejected similar resolutions at its previous General Conference in 2008.

“Of course we care about the Palestinians and what they’ve been through,” Bob Long, a pastor-delegate from Oklahoma, said during the May 2 debate at the Tampa convention. “But we also care about the Israelis and what they’ve been through.” Don House, a lay delegate from Texas, warned the UMC against setting an unwelcome precedent. “We’d be targeting the companies that make the products, instead of the people who use the products,” he said.

This year, high-profile activists, such as Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, had lobbied in favor of divestment. “Such action made an enormous difference in apartheid South Africa,” the Nobel Peace Prize laureate said in the *Tampa Bay Times*. “It can make an enormous difference in creating a future of justice and equality for Palestinians and Jews in the Holy Land.”

But many American Jews had strongly opposed the divestment resolutions, calling them unfair and politically naive. “A one-sided approach damages the relationship between Jews and Christians that has been nurtured for decades,” about 1,200 North American rabbis wrote in an open letter. “It promotes a lopsided assessment of the causes of and solutions to the conflict, disregarding the complex history and geopolitics. Furthermore, it shamefully paints Israel as a pariah nation, solely responsible for frustrating peace.”

One of the rejected resolutions called out heavy machinery manufacturer Caterpillar Inc., Motorola Solutions and Hewlett-Packard, which have been accused of contributing to, and even profiting from, the destruction of Palestinian homes and

construction of Israeli settlements.

Earlier on May 2, UMC delegates did approve, by a 60–40 vote, a resolution voicing opposition to Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories. —RNS