

UCC votes to divest from Israeli companies in occupied territories

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(RNS) The nearly 1 million-member United Church of Christ voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to divest from companies that profit from the Israeli occupation and to boycott products of Israeli companies based in the West Bank, a move that follows a divestment vote taken by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) last spring.

The 508-124 vote of the UCC's General Synod marks a victory for a broad international movement that aims to pressure Israel into extracting itself from Palestinian lands by a strategy known as BDS—Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions—and could foreshadow similar resolutions now being considered by the Episcopal Church, which is holding its General Assembly this week, and Mennonite Church USA, whose convention began yesterday.

“In approving this resolution, the UCC has demonstrated its commitment to justice and equality,” said Mitri Raheb, a Christian Palestinian pastor in Jordan and the Holy Land, who traveled to Cleveland for the synod. “For Palestinians living under occupation or facing systematic discrimination as citizens of Israel, enduring the destruction of their homes and businesses, the theft of their land for settlements, and living under blockade and siege in Gaza, this action sends a strong signal that they are not alone, and that there are churches who still dare to speak truth to power and stand with the oppressed.”

Israel took the West Bank and Gaza during the 1967 Six-Day War. Though it has returned other lands, it maintains the occupation of the West Bank and a blockade of Gaza, which is ruled by Hamas.

Though one Jewish group, Jewish Voices for Peace, has actively promoted divestment resolutions under consideration by Protestant denominations this summer, mainstream Jewish groups overwhelmingly blast the strategy as one-sided

and oblivious to some Palestinians' willingness to resort to terrorism.

"The UCC's one-sided view of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process singles out Israel and, shockingly, ignores any Palestinian accountability," said Noam Marans, the American Jewish Committee's director of interreligious and intergroup relations. "Blatantly absent from the 2015 UCC resolutions is any mention of Hamas, the terrorist group that still controls Gaza and instigated last summer's war with Israel by firing thousands of rockets and missiles and building an extensive tunnel network to infiltrate Israel to harm and kill Israeli civilians."

The UCC this week also voted to boycott games and merchandise of the Washington, D.C., NFL team, until the owners change its name, which many church members and Native Americans consider racist.