

Let's keep talking

...about just peace in Palestine and Israel



Conversation starters for your faith community



In 2012, the General Council of The United Church of Canada joined others in the international community in supporting the end of Israel's decades-old military occupation of Palestinian territories by approving a focused economic action against products made in illegal Israeli settlements.

This step responded to the spirit of the historic “Kairos Palestine” ecumenical call from Palestinian Christians (www.kairospalestine.ps, “Kairos Document” tab).

The call for economic action was one of a number of steps the General Council approved to put into action its position that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a major contributor to the injustice that underlies the violence in the region.

Some in the church welcomed this decision and the launch of the accompanying Unsettling Goods economic action campaign, while others opposed these actions. In between, many United Church people still struggle to know what to think.

This brochure addresses some of the most common concerns that have been raised about the United Church's Unsettling Goods campaign. It adds to the Frequently Asked Questions resource already available at www.united-church.ca (search “Unsettling Goods”). We hope you will find this document helpful as you engage in courageous conversations and respectful dialogue in your congregation or community. This brochure invites you to think about your own response to some common questions. Which ones have you heard? Which ones do you struggle with?

Please consider organizing a conversation in your worshipping community or committee using our new “Let's keep talking” worship and conversation resources, videos, this brochure, and the accompanying poster, as well as other Unsettling Goods resources found on www.united-church.ca.

Will there ever be peace in Palestine and Israel?

As people of faith, we live in hope and act for the wholeness of creation. We know from **Palestinians and Israelis** that most **want the conflict and the occupation to end**. Most also want equal human rights and self-determination. Over the decades there have been many examples of peaceful co-operation, even during times of intense violence, and this continues today.

Are Palestinians terrorists?

How can an entire nation or people be "terrorist"? Some Palestinians have turned to violent resistance, but **many have refused violence. Unsettling Goods is part of that non-violent response** to the military occupation and explores the root causes of the violence.

Do Palestinians really want peace?

Most Palestinians want peace. They want a just peace: a peace that recognizes their human rights and humanity, and that honours their right to self-determination. While peace negotiations have continued, settlements have expanded. **Palestinians believe that a just peace is a lasting peace.**

Is there such a thing as Palestine?

Palestine wasn't a state before 1948. But neither was Israel. Canada didn't complete its own journey to full nationhood until the repatriation of the Constitution in 1982. **Palestine exists**, whether one sees it as a state in waiting, a state today, an eventual binational, single state shared with Israel, or an Indigenous people struggling for nationhood.

Did God give Israel the land?

There are many ways to read our sacred texts, but using the Bible to justify modern claims about land is problematic. We have always believed in God's promise of peace; whatever creates violent competition is not of God. **Both Israelis and Palestinians have deep and historic connections with the land.** May that be our starting point.

Is religion the root cause of this conflict?

Religion has never been the main motivation in this conflict, even taking into account the modern surge in political religious movements inside both Israel and occupied Palestinian territories. Religion may inflame tensions that already exist, but **the conflict and the military occupation are about land, security, and self-determination**, not about religion or ethnic differences.

Is the church taking sides?

In its global work, **the United Church works with and through partners.** Palestinian Christians are long-term partners, and we respond to the issues they face. We work toward a vision of peace with justice and true security. While acknowledging the legitimacy of the State of Israel and denouncing violent acts by both Palestinians and Israelis, we name the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands—including the continuing growth of settlements—as a major obstacle to peace in the region.

Should the church be involved in politics?

The prophets got involved with the justice issues of their time, and Jesus did likewise. God calls us to end conflict and share creation, to seek justice and love kindness. These are holy and faithful words!

Do boycotts accomplish anything?

These people might say they do: the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, the Lubicon Cree, and the millions who made their work and many other successful boycotts possible. Boycotts are slow. They are often controversial. They're also **a time-honored, non-violent way to address injustices** that have deep roots.

Doesn't boycotting settlement goods hurt Palestinians?

In some limited cases, it may. **The encroachment of Israeli settlements in occupied territory hurts Palestinians far more.** Palestinian poverty is directly related to the land appropriation, violence, and enormous restrictions on movement that are part of the occupation. Low-wage jobs in an Israeli Jewish-owned factory built on Palestinian lands won't change that; they can't change that. Until the occupation ends, poverty, violence, and a complete absence of self-determination will be the bread that all Palestinian workers and their families must eat every day. This focused form of economic action was chosen specifically to help bring awareness of the serious issues around settlements.

Is the United Church boycotting Israel?

The United Church is asking settlement enterprises, built deliberately on occupied Palestinian land, to end their production on this land; retailers to stop carrying these products; and United Church members to stop purchasing them. **This action focuses only on Israeli settlement products** and the government policy behind them, not on Israeli products in general.

Is the United Church antisemitic?

The United Church abhors antisemitism and all other forms of racism. Unsettling Goods is not about Jewish people. Rather, the campaign focuses on Israel's policy of building settlements on occupied Palestinian land, which the United Church has identified as a major contributor to the injustice that underlies the violence in the region.

Is the United Church obsessed with Israel?

The United Church is concerned about **all conflicts and situations of injustice**. We have worked for decades on issues of poverty and Indigenous rights in Canada, as well as human rights and peace in other countries. The struggles against apartheid in South Africa and the civil wars in Central America are notable examples. United Church decisions regarding Palestine/Israel emerged in 1971 with the awareness of the impacts of the 1967 occupation. **It is the occupation that the United Church is concerned about.**

Do Muslims hate Israel?

Many people including Muslims oppose the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. This is not the same as “hating Israel.” Muslims make up almost a quarter of the world’s population. This would be like saying, “All Christians—a third of the world’s population—support Israel.” **As in every large, diverse community, there is a wide range of opinion.** Islamophobia is a growing problem in Canada. The United Church’s study and policy *That We May Know Each Other* is recommended reading and action for all parts of the church.

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This brochure and the related poster are designed to be conversation starters in your congregation. They name common questions and myths that can block us from having helpful discussions about just peace in Palestine and Israel. Each response is intended to encourage deeper consideration of the issue.

Order now!

Free copies of this brochure are available to distribute in your faith community and use in worship or workshops. Request copies from unsettling-goods@united-church.ca.

Go online for more!

Search “Unsettling Goods” on www.united-church.ca for these “Let’s keep talking” resources:

- **Worship resources:** Suggestions for three Sundays—prayers, lectionary reflections, sermons ideas, hymn and video suggestions.
- **“Let’s keep talking” videos:** A collection of short videos—each responding to one question—for use in worship and workshops. From United Church members, partners, and friends around the world such as former Moderator Gary Paterson; Nora Carmi, Palestinian partner; Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb of the Shomer Shalom Network for Jewish Nonviolence; Izzeldin Abuelaish, doctor and professor; Dawn Waring, Ecumenical Accompanier; Liat Rosenberg, from the Israeli organization Zochrot; and former Moderator David Giuliano.
- **Workshop outline:** A process for using the videos and brochure in an interactive process that encourages courageous conversations.
- **Short study outline for meetings:** A process for using the videos and brochure at gatherings such as board, presbytery, or UCW meetings.



“Let’s keep talking” is part of the United Church’s Unsettling Goods Campaign.

www.united-church.ca