

Consultation on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

Background Notes

Introduction and background to the Consultation: -

1 The purpose of this consultation

In July 2013 the Methodist Conference passed Notice of Motion 201. The motion requests the production of a briefing on the arguments for and against the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. The wording of the motion as revised and adopted by Methodist Conference is as follows:

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, Divestment, Sanctions Movement, and for the Methodist Council to bring a report based upon the briefing to the Conference of 2014.

This consultation has been launched to gather a range of perspectives on this topic and is open to all. People are invited to respond either in a personal capacity or as representatives of organisations. Responses will be kept confidential unless specific agreement is made to the contrary.

The briefing commissioned by the Methodist Conference will reflect the range of perspectives on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions arising from this consultation. It is hoped that this briefing will offer helpful reflection for Methodist people as they consider how to respond to the call of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

2 The process for reporting to the Methodist Council

Responses to this consultation are required by **Monday 4 November**. A briefing will be drafted on the basis of responses received from the online consultation, other written responses and interviews conducted in the UK, Israel and Palestine. This process will be overseen by a reference group approved by the Methodist Council in October 2013.

The briefing will be submitted to the Methodist Council in January 2014. At this point the briefing will be in the public domain as the Methodist Council papers are published on the website of the Methodist Church. The Methodist Council will then prepare a report based on the briefing document for the 2014 Methodist Conference.

3 Background – The BDS Movement and the Kairos Call

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, to which Notice of Motion 201 refers, was launched in July 2005. We do not attempt to provide here a list of resources on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, but references to three documents, from Kairos Palestine, Kairos Britain and the Board of Deputies of British Jews, would seem appropriate.

Kairos Palestine – A Moment of Truth

In 2009 a group of Palestinian Christians worked for over a year to produce the document [A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering](#).¹ The document is, in essence, a theological reflection on the occupation. The use of the ancient Greek word ‘Kairos’ (meaning a significant moment in time) takes inspiration from the theological statement issued in 1985 by a group of black South African theologians. *A Moment of Truth* declares that the military occupation of the land is a sin against God and humanity, and that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history that legitimises the occupation is far from Christian teachings. True Christian theology is a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed; a call to justice and equality among peoples.

The initiators of Kairos Palestine have appealed for *A Moment of Truth* to be read in a broad theological context as a Palestinian expression of hope, love, prayer and faith in God. However, it has particularly become noted for its call to action, including the use of boycott, divestment and sanctions. While condemning “all forms of racism, whether religious or ethnic, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia” the document calls on the international community to respond to the call for the “beginning of a system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel”. The Kairos document has since been supported by 3,000 Palestinian Christians and Kairos Palestine has appealed for responses from individuals, Christian organisations and churches internationally.

Kairos Britain – Time for Action

Following the Iona Call of 2012, a group of Christians under the banner of Kairos Britain published [Time for Action](#),² which is described as the British Christian response to *A Moment of Truth*. It closely reflects the assessment provided by Kairos Palestine while offering additional commentary on Britain’s historical role. A section titled ‘Equal Dignity’ examines Jewish-Christian relations and Muslim-Christian relations. The writers endorse the call to Churches and Christians to boycott everything that supports the occupation. They state that “BDS is directed against Israeli policy, not the state itself, or its citizens” and express distress that many have confused these actions with anti-Semitism.

Zionism: A Jewish Communal Response

Following the publication of the Kairos Palestine document, *A Moment of Truth*, the Board of Deputies of British Jews published [Zionism: A Jewish Communal Response](#).³ The document is based around four contributions from leading rabbis and thinkers from across the spectrum of the Jewish religious community. It seeks to address a growing concern amongst the UK Jewish community that Christians are too ready to dismiss Zionism as a political movement of only incidental importance to Judaism, rather than a central facet of Jewish identity. *Zionism: A Jewish Communal Response* provides a perspective on fundamental issues around identity and belonging. The foreword to the report argues that the Kairos Palestine document ignores a Jewish narrative whereas any successful resolution of the conflict must take into account the aspirations and the pain of both sides.

The Methodist Church is conscious that there is a tendency towards a growing polarization in the debate around the Israel/Palestine conflict. The way in which dialogue is conducted is crucial to increasing understanding (see on this, the [appeal from the International Council of Christian and Jews](#)).⁴ An interfaith visit to Israel and Palestine is planned later this year

facilitated by Forum for Discussion of Israel and Palestine (FODIP) as a part of a Methodist commitment to a dialogue involving encounter, discernment and shared experience.

4 The Conference of the Methodist Church in Britain and Israel/Palestine

The annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Britain has engaged in debate on Israel and Palestine at most Conferences over the past 15 years.

A Methodist Church in Britain position on peace in the Holy Land was defined in Notice of Motion 17 at the 2001 Methodist Conference, and forms the basis of the Methodist Church position today namely: -

In summary, the Methodist position is that a return to the borders of 1967 and a status for Jerusalem as a place for two nations and three faiths, with parity of esteem, is the real basis upon which trust could be built up among the different communities. The desire for a lasting peace can only be based on trust, security and freedom from fear for all people in the area.

In 2010, the Methodist Conference passed a series of [resolutions](#) following its receipt of the report *Justice for Palestine and Israel*. This included resolution 14/9:

The Methodist Conference notes 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 calls on the Methodist people to support and engage with this boycott of Israeli goods emanating from illegal settlements.

In response to a request from Methodist Conference the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) produced a position paper, *Guidelines for Constructive Corporate Engagement Related to Israel/Palestine*. It was received by the Methodist Council in 2007 and formed the basis for the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church (CFB) policy statement, *Investment in Israel/Palestine* that addresses the CFB approach to engagement, investment and disinvestment in the region. These documents can be found here: www.cfbmethodistchurch.org.uk/ethics. Portfolio holdings can be seen in the latest [CFB annual report](#).⁵

[Methodist Conference reports, resolutions and notice of motions on Israel Palestine since 2002](#)⁶ are available from the Israel/Palestine page of the website of the Methodist Church.

5 Guidance on responding to this Consultation

Respondents are encouraged to submit responses to this consultation through the online form. www.methodist.org.uk/BDSBriefing Responses are required by **08.00am on Monday 4 November 2013**. Early responses would be appreciated.

The use of the online form will enable your response to be processed more easily. If you wish to offer additional material or for other reasons cannot submit a response through the online form please contact Peter Tidey at tideyp@methodistchurch.org.uk. A printable copy of the online questionnaire is available here www.methodist.org.uk/BDSBriefing.

Respondents should not feel obliged to address all the questions. We appreciate that some respondents may have one or two key observations that they wish to make in which case they may leave many of the questions unaddressed.

Responses to this consultation will be treated confidentially. When views or quotes from respondents are referred to by the briefing they will be recorded anonymously. An exception will be made where responses are provided on behalf of organisations (or individuals representing organisations) and the organisation concerned would appreciate attribution.

- 1 www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf
- 2 www.kairosbritain.org.uk/resources/documents/Time-for-Action/Time-for-Action.pdf
- 3 www.bod.org.uk/content/ZionismAJewishCommunalResponse.pdf
- 4 www.iccj.org/ICCJ-Pleads-Let-Us-Have-Mercy-upon-Words-When-Discussing-Middle-East.132.0.html
- 5 www.cfbmethodistchurch.org.uk/downloads/CFB-Annual-Report-2013-Funds-Performance.pdf
- 6 www.methodist.org.uk/media/942385/methodist_conference_and_council_reports_and_resolutions_on_israel-palestine_2002-2013.pdf