

November 6, 2017

Dear Members of Congress,

We write as U.S. Christian churches and organizations committed to justice and peace in the Middle East. This commitment stems from our connections to the Biblical and historical places of our faith; our continuing partnership and engagement with churches and other religious institutions there; and our theological understanding of peace with justice, which compels us to support nonviolent means to end the 50-year-old occupation and support equal rights for all people—Israelis and Palestinians alike.

We are deeply concerned by the introduction of the “Israel Anti-Boycott Act” in the Senate (S.720) and in the House (H.R.1697). This legislation, if adopted, would put legal obstacles in the way of nonviolent peaceful action meant to bring about social change, and would legislate against the freedom to make choices in the stewardship of our financial resources. The bills also conflate Israel and the settlements, erasing the important distinction between Israel and its illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. They further imply that opposition to Israel’s practices in the territories is the same as being anti-Israel. We are troubled by the bills’ intent to penalize or criminalize the use of economic measures as a legitimate means of opposing policies that inhibit human rights, in this case, of the Palestinians.

We are concerned by any legislation that suppresses legitimate criticism of public policy, and that restricts freedom of expression and our ability to determine our own witness through investment and selective purchasing practices. While we may not be of one mind about which measures are most effective, we collectively affirm and defend the right of churches and organizations to use economic measures in the specific case of Israel-Palestine. This is consistent with how churches and church-related organizations have employed economic measures as nonviolent tactics in many instances of seeking justice and peace throughout history.

As churches and church-related organizations, we all share a hope and desire for an end to occupation, an end to violence and terrorism, and for equal rights for all people. If our respective denominations and organizations, through debate and reflection, adopt policies that employ economic leverage to advance these policy objectives, as we do with many other policy objectives, we believe it is our right to do so. It is an assertion of our right as stewards of our financial resources to spend and invest according to our theological and moral conviction, expressed in our respective denominational or organizational policies.

In this case, our assertion of this right is an effort to change unjust Israeli policy toward Palestinians, *not* to delegitimize the State of Israel, nor to marginalize or isolate our Jewish neighbors, or their enterprises. Our choices to purchase and invest responsibly, and to advocate with corporations or governments, are motivated by our firm commitments to justice and peace for all people, without discrimination or exclusion.

As churches and church-related organizations, we reject any efforts by the state to curtail these rights. We urge you to oppose the proposed legislation, and thus support the rights of individuals and institutions to spend and invest in accordance with their faith, values, and policies.

Sincerely,

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