

The Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted the following Resolution following the United Methodist General Conference. It expresses appreciation for the outcome of legislation relating to Palestine/Israel, while decrying the study produced by the Women's Division. It expresses hope for positive future relations between United Methodists and Jews.

Adopted CCAR Resolution on the 2008 United Methodist Church General Conference

Adopted by the CCAR Board
May 15, 2008

Background

The United Methodist Church (UMC) is large, complex, and diverse. It includes semi-independent bodies which act with a great deal of autonomy. In anticipation of the April, 2008 quadrennial UMC General Conference, the Jewish Community had cause for concern about the future of Jewish-Methodist relations. The outcome of the General Conference, however, presents new hope for the positive cooperation of these two religious communities.

The Jewish community's concern resulted from having been made aware of multiple proposed resolutions calling for the UMC to divest itself of holdings in certain corporations doing business in Israel,¹ and of other one-sided proposed resolutions, casting Israel as a villain – in many cases, as the sole villain – in the protracted violence in the Middle East.

In the run-up to the meeting, the Jewish community was particularly distressed by the publication by the Women's Division of the UMC Board of Global Ministries of a 2008 "Mission Study" that "calls Israelis terrorists, likens Israelis to Nazis, labels Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, an 'extremist,' and uses the phrase 'original sin' to describe the birth of Israel."²

Unfortunately, anti-Israel forces have sought, and too often found, fertile ground in the policy-making bodies of Mainline Protestant Churches, which are our partners in so many causes central to our social justice concerns. Mainline Protestants' concern for the welfare and self-determination of the Palestinian people, which we share,³ sadly has too frequently been transformed into one-sided, slanted, and occasionally slanderous attacks upon Israel.

However, anti-Israel activists did not find the UMC to be the fertile ground they sought. As an umbrella body as in its individual local churches, the UMC enjoys a long

¹ CCAR's objection to divestment as a tool in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is found in the CCAR Resolution on Economic Actions Including Divestment as Obstacles to the Advancement of Middle East Peace," 2005.

² "Thoughts on the Task of Peace Making in the Middle East: A Message to Our Methodist Friends," American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, Hadassah, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, Union for Reform Judaism, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism; April, 2008

³ See "Where We Stand on Israel," adopted by the CCAR in 2003; CCAR Resolution on Gaza and the West Bank, 2006; and CCAR Resolution on Israel at 60, 2008.

history of standing with the Jewish people and seeking strong and positive interfaith relations with us.

For example, “Building New Bridges of Hope,” adopted by the UMC General Conference in 1996, is a remarkable statement of Christian-Jewish relations. This widely-disseminated document addresses present day Christian-Jewish relations, the long history of Christian anti-Semitism, up to and including Christians’ role in the Holocaust; and the State of Israel, all in ways that we would warmly embrace.

At the 2008 General Conference, divestment targeted at Israel was fully rejected. On the last day of the Conference, a motion made to reconsider divestment was rejected by some 90% of the delegates. The UMC’s rejection of Israel-targeted divestment was overwhelming and resounding. Perhaps that rejection will be heard as a clarion call to those who would seek to continue these anti-Israel efforts in other national church bodies.

Much more good news for Methodist-Jewish relations came out of the 2008 General Conference. Continuing its work on “Building New Bridges of Hope,” the General Board of Interfaith Relations and Christian Unity proposed resolutions on Holocaust Awareness and opposing Proselytization of Jews. Both passed by general consent. Admittedly, though, not every action at the 2008 General Conference was welcome. One resolution condemning alleged Israeli violations of human rights⁴ was adopted, signifying that there continues to be a need for dialogue between the Jewish community and the UMC.

Many groups worked together to achieve positive outcomes at the General Conference: United Methodists, Jewish organizations – most notably the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), the Union for Reform Judaism, and the American Jewish Committee – and others.

National Jewish leaders successfully publicized the matter, so that local Jewish leaders, including many CCAR member Rabbis, could engage their Methodist partners in individual communities. The CCAR held a well-attended Conference Call on the matter, at the behest of our President, Peter Knobel, enabling colleagues to become well educated on the issue.

As troubled as we continue to be by the Mission Study released by the Women’s Division of the Board of Global Ministries, we now know better than ever that this particular document’s hateful words do not represent the UMC as a whole.

Therefore, Be It Resolved, that the Central Conference of American Rabbis:

1. Applauds delegates to the 2008 United Methodist Church General Conference, who overwhelmingly rejected divestment and other biased resolutions targeted at Israel;

⁴ Said resolution includes language such as: “WHEREAS, for more than 40 years the government of Israel has continued its military occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza and the seizing of more and more Palestinian land for illegal settlements in direct violation of UN resolutions as well as United Methodist General Conference resolutions, and WHEREAS, the International Court of Justice, on July 9, 2004, issued an advisory opinion which declared: that Israel’s security barrier or wall built on occupied Palestinian territories violates international law; that it must be dismantled; and that compensation must be provided to Palestinians for loss of land and livelihood, and WHEREAS, Israel’s government has continued to build the wall on Palestinian land in ongoing violation of international law which greatly increases Palestinian suffering as well as heightens the insecurity of both Palestinians and Israelis;” but includes no language taking issue with any actions on the part of Palestinians.

2. Expresses continued admiration for the UMC's work on Christian-Jewish relations, as evidenced in "Building Bridges of Hope" and in important extensions of that effort adopted at this year's General Conference; and as evidenced through countless local and individual encounters.
3. Commends its own members, other Jewish leaders and our Christian partners, who worked together toward a largely positive result at the UMC General Conference.
4. Deplores the 2008 Mission Study issued by the Women's Division of the UMC Board of Global Ministries because of its hate-filled and biased characterization of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and commends the JCPA Analysis of said Mission Study to its members and to any Methodists or others who would consider utilizing that Mission Study for a teaching purpose.
5. Hopes that UMC bodies will produce contemporary alternatives to the 2008 Women's Division Mission Study, so that United Methodists will have up-to-date, Methodist-produced guides for studying the current situation in Israel in ways that are in keeping with all United Methodist concerns and commitments in that troubled part of the globe; and
6. Looks forward to building upon institutional relationships and individual friendships built between Methodists and Jews before and during the 2008 General Conference, with the prayer that each of our communities will continue to strengthen the other, as each grows in faith and in service.