

United Methodists reject divestment from Israel

May 2, 2008

NOTE: Photographs are available with this report at www.gc2008.umc.org.

*By Linda Bloom**

FORT WORTH, Texas (UMNS) — United Methodists have rejected attempts to have the denomination endorse divestment from Israel as a way of addressing the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The actions occurred during General Conference, the church's top legislative body, meeting April 23-May 2 at the Fort Worth Convention Center.

A number of petitions, including five from U.S. annual (regional) conferences, were folded into one petition on "divestment" that called on the denomination's pension board and finance agency "to review and identify companies that profit from sales of products or services that cause harm to Palestinians and Israelis and begin phased selective divestment from these companies."

That petition was rejected May 2 by General Conference delegates as they voted on a special consent calendar.

A divestment petition from the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), "Promoting Peace through Ethical Investment," also was rejected on the same consent calendar. The petition had called upon a number of United Methodist entities to undertake a "phased, selective divestment from companies that support the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and other violations of human rights in Palestine/Israel."

MFSA had been successful in appealing to the General Conference Petitions Committee to remove its petition from an omnibus divestment petition and have it considered separately by a Financial Administration subcommittee.

Another petition from the Northern Illinois Conference, "Peace and Justice in the Holy Land," directed the Board of Pension and Health Benefits and Council on Finance and Administration to undertake a process of phased, selective divestment. It was voted down by consent calendar on May 1.

General Conference did adopt a petition on the Middle East conflict submitted by the denomination's Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns as part of the consent calendar approved April 29. That petition calls for the church to continue "to advocate for a peaceful settlement of the conflict ... through negotiation and diplomacy rather than through methods of violence and coercion."

The week before General Conference began, officials of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society withdrew a petition calling for divestment from Caterpillar Inc. because of charges that the company profits from illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and contributes to the occupation by supplying Israeli Defense Forces with heavy equipment.

The officials said talks with Caterpillar have resulted in the company issuing a statement denouncing immoral use of its equipment and agreeing to continue dialogue.

Church and Society will report to the 2012 General Conference on the progress of the discussions with Caterpillar. About \$5 million of the denomination's estimated \$17 billion pension portfolio is invested in Caterpillar stock.

*Bloom is a United Methodist News Service writer based in New York

News media contact: Linda Bloom, e-mail: newsdesk@umcom.org, call (615) 742-5470.