



“BDS”: What does the ELCA say?

ELCA policies regarding boycott, divestment, and sanctions, including relevant actions from the 2005, 2007 and 2011 Churchwide Assemblies and guidance from the 1995 ELCA Social Statement on Peace.

The issues of boycotts, divestment and sanctions in relation to the Israel-Palestine situation have become more prominent in news reports and discussions in recent years. The following summary seeks to outline what the ELCA has said about or undertaken in relation to those topics, sometimes generically, in recent years.

The **2005 [Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine](#)**, adopted by the Church Council, included a call for:

6. stewarding financial resources - - both U.S. tax dollars and private funds -- in ways that support the quest for a just peace in the Holy Land; and
7. giving generously to help ensure the continuation of the schools and other ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and the humanitarian work of The Lutheran World Federation through Augusta Victoria Hospital and other ministries.

In addition, the strategy said this about our foreign aid:

"To advance these objectives " (a just peace with two secure, viable states living side by side in peace and with mutual recognition and a shared Jerusalem – added here for clarification) "the ELCA has focused attention on the use of U.S. tax dollars for foreign assistance. The ELCA has stated that such aid must be related to the willingness of nations in the Middle East to negotiate with one another in good faith. Specifically, the ELCA has urged 1) that no U.S. funds be used for military assistance; 2) called for a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity; 3) opposed further housing loan guarantees to Israel unless and until the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied territories is stopped;

In **2007**, the Churchwide Assembly affirmed the strategy and refined the call, saying:

5. To call upon the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to underscore the call for economic initiatives by this church and its members in the "Peace, Not Walls" campaign. Such initiatives, in consultation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, could include:
 - purchasing of products from Palestinian providers and

- exploration of the feasibility of refusing to buy products produced in Israeli settlements. Also to be explored is the entire investment activity by this church. Examination of investments would exclude the option of divestiture.

In **2011**, the Churchwide Assembly voted:

... to encourage member, congregations, synods, and agencies of this church to ... consider making positive economic investments in those Palestinian projects and businesses that peacefully strengthen the economic and social fabric of Palestinian society ... [and] to decline to undertake a review of the investment of funds managed within the ELCA but to commend these recommendations to the Office of the Treasurer, the Office of the Secretary, the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, the Mission Advancement unit, and the ELCA Board of Pensions for consideration.¹

Other related activities

In 2005 the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program developed a response to the Churchwide Assembly's action urging ELCA members to participate in the Peace Not Walls campaign. After study, the following plan of action for the program's work was approved in 2007:

- Continue to exercise our weapons economic social criteria investment screen.
- Continue the dialogue with Caterpillar on development of a human rights policy, expressing our continuing concern with the presence of their product in the Middle East hostilities and destruction of Palestinian homes.
- Continue to review the possibility of approaching other companies on a human rights (resolution) basis.
- Consider opportunities and limitations for fulfilling the mandate of the Peace Not Walls campaign relative to the stewardship of resources, specifically in the area of multinational corporations that have established facilities or operations in the occupied Palestinian territory (as defined by the United Nations).

Whenever possible, this work would be undertaken with our ecumenical partners whenever their strategy is in line with our Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine.

In April 2009 a guide for congregations, synods and Lutheran institutions on how to develop a selective purchasing policy was approved. One segment of that guide pertains to the Middle East.

In addition the Peace Not Walls campaign website describes a variety of possible positive investments to support Palestinians and their economy that can be made through travel, purchasing crafts and supporting the ELCJHL's Schools, the Augusta Victoria Hospital and Global Mission personnel.

The ELCA Church Council has approved a number of social investment criteria screens which provide a way for the ELCA to look at its investments through the lens of faith.

All of the screens begin with the social policy of the Church. The ELCA's social statements and social policy resolutions outline the policy of the church on a variety of current issues. This is interpreted for investment practices through the development of a social criteria investment screen. When a screen is approved by the Church Council, it is distributed to a range of Lutheran entities for them to implement.

¹ See Legislative Update, August 18, 2011, p. 7 <http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/CWA11/LegislativeUpdate20110906.pdf>

But, regardless of the subject matter, every screen is given for guidance to the bodies that implement them, whether it is a synod, individual congregation or something as large as Portico (formerly known as the Board of Pensions of the ELCA). CSR recognizes that various investors will implement these screens along a continuum. Some examples include the ability to fund research in an area or carrying out a specific fiduciary duty. Each member and each organization will implement a screen based on their own set of standards.

Some of CSR's activities involve dialogues and resolutions. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) is where the work of CSR traditionally takes place. The ELCA CSR program works with ICCR partners (other ICCR members) from a variety of denominations, religious orders and the socially responsible investment community. In 2005 a sub-group gathered to see if there was work around the Middle East that could be done together. The work has centered on the development of corporate human rights policies, equal employment opportunity and a presence of factories in the settlements.

All of the dialogues that ELCA participates in are framed by the Issue Papers which have been developed. These are used to guide the internal work of the CSR program as well as give guidance to those voting proxy resolutions throughout the church.

ELCA Policy and the "BDS" Movement

In some circles, the three economic options of boycott, divestment, and sanctions have been bundled together in what is called the "BDS movement." Since churchwide assembly actions have specifically excluded one possibility (divestment), ELCA policy is best described when the three concepts are considered separately.

Divestment

The ELCA has no general policy to support or direct a procedure of divestment. Absent such a policy, the ELCA could not make a decision for divestment of investments. It should also be noted that all separately incorporated entities of the ELCA including Portico, may choose to implement ELCA policy recommendations within their own guidelines and fiduciary duties. When it comes to the specific situation concerning the economic activities of the Peace Not Walls campaign, the 2007 Churchwide assembly action specifically excludes the option of exploration of divestment (see point 5 in 2007 assembly action above).

Boycotts

The ELCA has a specific and restrictive procedure concerning any possible boycott.

A boycott has been defined as a collective effort to abstain from the purchase or use of products or services provided by a targeted firm, government, or other agency. The purpose of a boycott is to persuade the targeted entity to cease certain practices judged to be unjust, and/or to perform certain practices deemed to be just.

Boycotts in the faith community have been taken both against an individual company -- such as the Nestlé infant formula boycott which began in the 1970s -- or an industry such as the lettuce boycott of the 1980s. Boycotts only work if there is an economic impact and media coverage. The ELCA's procedure concerning a boycott is detailed and therefore would likely take some time to be considered.

Sanctions

Another topic much discussed is sanctions. These are sometimes defined as punitive or restrictive measures taken, usually by several countries in concert, to pressure a country to change its certain policies. The 1995 ELCA social statement, *For Peace in God's World*, states that:

"In support for just political structures, we ... acknowledge that the responsible use of sanctions may on occasion be the most effective and least harmful measure to lead states to stop oppressing their people"

In addition, this statement affirmed that the U.S. should revitalize its aid program to people in poorer nations, supported continued and increased development assistance by the U.S., and called for the gradual realignment of U.S. aid toward more development assistance and a proportional reduction in subsidies to purchase weapons. According to the peace statement, "Aid should be provided in ways that promote human rights and build self-reliant individuals, communities, and nations. . . . Aid also should require accountability on the part of recipient governments."

The statement also says this, under the heading of "Control and reduce the arms trade:"

"Heavily armed nations continue to spend billions on arms. As one of the world's leading arms exporters, the United States has a special responsibility to reduce arms sales and to seek proper international control agreements over the worldwide sale and transfer of arms by the major exporters. We:

- support legislation to prohibit United States military assistance and arms transfers to governments that use them to oppress their own citizens or to engage in acts of aggression; and
- encourage international efforts to make arms sales open to public scrutiny and to reduce the arms trade."

In addition to this social statement, The U.S. Christian Ecumenical Delegation to the Middle East, which included former ELCA presiding bishop Herbert Chilstrom and synodical bishops Margaret Payne and Theodore Schneider, released a statement on December 12, 2000, calling on the United States to "make all necessary changes so that U.S. aid to Israel is administered and made accountable consistent with the rules and procedures that are applied to every other recipient of U.S. aid." The delegation also called on the U.S. government to "suspend current sales of attack helicopters to Israel pending investigation of their use against civilian targets as well as assurances that they will be used in conformity with United States law covering "end-use" in our weapons sales."

The 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly requested that the presiding bishop send a letter to the President of the United States, Vice President, Secretary of State, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and all members of Congress urging the conversion of funds presently budgeted or allocated for military assistance for nations of the Middle East to support for humanitarian assistance and economic aid and discouraging the private, direct or indirect, sale of military weaponry to Middle Eastern nations..

A similar letter to the one in the year 2001 was requested by the 1991 Churchwide Assembly, asking these officials to relate U.S. foreign assistance to the willingness of those nations to negotiate with one another in good faith and to adhere to international law and human rights conventions; and to oppose further housing loan guarantees to Israel unless and until the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied territories is stopped."