

Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions – ELCA Policy with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Boycotts, divestment and sanctions are three types of actions with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that are often bundled together by both supporters and opponents. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) does not group these as one but rather has policy that relates to each activity separately.

In broadest terms, the ELCA is not engaged in a boycott against Israel, it has encouraged its pension board to screen their shareholdings based on human rights criteria and the ELCA has not adopted sanctions. However, it has taken [several actions related to these three types of activity](#).

Boycotts

The ELCA is not engaged in a boycott against Israel. It has, however, [defended U.S. citizens' individual right to boycott as a matter of free speech](#), discouraged the purchase of products produced within Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and encouraged the purchase of Palestinian products and economic investments in Palestinian projects and businesses.

Divestment

The ELCA in its 2007 Churchwide Assembly took action to examine the investment activity of the ELCA and voted to “exclude the option of divestiture.”

The ELCA in its 2016 Churchwide Assembly adopted a resolution which called for the development of a [human rights social criteria investment screen](#) based on the church’s social teachings and with specific reference to concerns raised in the ELCA Middle East strategy “Peace Not Walls.” It called on its members and ELCA related entities to engage in shareholder advocacy in support of human rights.

To undergird the proposed human rights investment screen, the ELCA developed a human rights social message, addressing the broader global crisis of human rights abuses and the church’s response and commitments. Upon its adoption by the ELCA Church Council in 2017, the Council then approved the requested investment screen in 2018. Portico Benefits Services (the ELCA pension board) began implementing the screen with a focus on disputed or occupied territories in 2019.

Sanctions

The ELCA has not adopted sanctions against any country although its 1995 social statement, “For Peace in God’s World”, considers them a measure which may be most effective and least harmful way to stop government from oppressing their people.

That social statement also said that the ELCA supports 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. In that regard, the 2016 Churchwide Assembly Action urged “this church’s members, congregations, synods, agencies and presiding bishop to call on their U.S. Representatives, Senators and the Administration to take action requiring that, to continue receiving U.S. financial and military aid, Israel must comply with internationally recognized human rights standards as specified in existing U.S. law, stop settlement building and the expansion of existing settlements in East Jerusalem

and the West Bank, end its occupation of Palestinian territory, and enable an independent Palestinian state...." In March 2018 ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton joined 14 other Christian leaders in a [letter to Congress on militarization of the Middle East](#) which took up human rights and U.S. military assistance concerns with respect to Israel and other countries in the region.

Living Stones

The ELCA recognizes that discernment on these activities requires careful listening to the voices of Palestinians whose daily lives are most affected by the continued occupation of Palestinian territories and the growth of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. This includes [visiting the Palestinian people to learn more](#) about their experiences, especially the leadership and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

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