

Political and Civil Human Rights: Equal Access and Participation ELCA Social Criteria Investment Screen

Authority: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has consistently affirmed its support for human rights as “a common universal standard of justice for living with our differences.” The Social Statement *For Peace in God’s World*¹ is grounded in the understanding that God desires Shalom for all human beings and commits the ELCA to “defend the human rights of groups most susceptible to violations...”

Several ELCA statements such as *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*² and *Sufficient Sustainable Livelihood for All*³ also name the defense of human rights as a task for this church and its members. The Social Message on Human Rights affirms on the basis of these and other ELCA teachings six broad categories on human rights as a middle link between the UN Declaration of Human Rights⁴ and specific actions. One of these categories confirms that humans are political and civic beings with the right to equal access and participation in legal and political decisions affecting them. The message also expresses that this church’s witness includes exercising financial power as an investor and shareholder prudently to focus attention on egregious violations of human rights, and to encourage corporations to take responsibility to respect human rights.

Social Policy Resolution 16.06.31⁵ directed development of “a human rights social criteria investment screen based on the social teachings of this church and, in the case of Israel and Palestine, specifically based on the concerns raised in the *Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine*,” including the management of collective or personal investments “with concern for their impact on the lives of all Holy Land peoples who suffer from the ongoing conflict.”

The Engagement Strategy gives priority to working toward “Israelis and Palestinians co-existing in justice and peace, as citizens of viable and secure Israeli and Palestinian states,” as foundational to building a just peace for all. Such citizenship is only possible when the rights of humans as political and civic beings are upheld.

Wording of screen: The ELCA recommends not investing in corporations benefiting from the most egregious denial of the rights of humans as political and civic beings to have equal access and participation in legal and political decisions affecting them.

Definition of problem: Equal access and participation in legal and political decisions cannot happen when they occur in conflict-affected countries, especially disputed or occupied territories. Recognizing that various investors will implement this along a continuum, for the purpose of this screen investments might include screening companies supporting and benefiting from occupation. It could also include investments that promote positive economic development in such regions.

¹ <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Peace>

² <https://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Church-in-Society>

³ <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Economic-Life>

⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

⁵ https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Justice_for_Holy_LandSPR16.pdf [link correction 3/20/24]

Social policy, Churchwide Assembly actions and studies:

For Peace in God's World <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Peace>
[ELCA 1995]

Sufficient Sustainable Livelihood for All <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Economic-Life> [ELCA 1999]; Church in Society... Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/PNW_Strategy.pdf?_ga=2.267827726.1850467427.1502898236-473792649.1477574731 Ammparo Strategy

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/AMMP_ARO_Strategy_Final_042616.pdf?_ga=2.261080141.1984756162.1505246798-1575

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