

# Why Does CT Continue to Invest (Employee Pension Money) in Israel?

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The decision on June 30 of the million-member United Church of Christ to join in measures of BDS — boycotts, divestments and sanctions — to pressure the Israeli government is of great, perhaps historic importance.

The UCC includes the Congregationalists, whose roots go back to the Pilgrims and Puritans and the founders of Yale and Harvard.

These are measures that Palestinian civil society organizations have been asking for since July 2005. Their nonviolent aim is to press Israel to grant equal rights to Palestinian Israelis (20 percent of the citizenry); end the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem; and recognize the legal rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes. Support for BDS is growing, especially after last year’s warfare in Gaza, when Israeli forces killed more than 500 children and 1,500 other Palestinians and laid waste to wide areas.

In the middle of the fighting, the United Nations said 370,000 Palestinian children had been traumatized so severely that they needed “psycho-social” first aid. Despite grandiose promises of help, Gaza is still in ruins. The U.N. refugee agency UNRWA (the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) reports that of the 9,000 private houses destroyed in Gaza, not one had been rebuilt as of April.

The devastation of Gaza underscored for the national organization Jewish Voice for Peace the need to increase its support for BDS. At its Baltimore meeting this year, JVP announced full support for BDS to the cheers of 600 members in the meeting hall. JVP later sent activists to the United Church of Christ’s General Synod, encouraging them to join in BDS actions. The Israeli government is intensely opposed to BDS. Its supporters were able to get Congress to add a provision into the Trans Pacific Partnership trade bill that says it shall be a trade objective of the United States to discourage BDS.

However, that same week the Obama administration said it would not oppose boycotts over activities in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, which the United States has always opposed. The Israeli paper Ha’aretz wrote, “The boycott of settlements, in effect, has now been officially stamped ‘kosher’ by the State Department.”

None of this has yet had any impact on state of Connecticut investment practices. The state has more than \$32 million invested in State of Israel Bonds and in Israeli companies. That means state employee and teacher pension money in part thrives on collaboration with Israeli occupation, segregation and settlement practices.

The money Connecticut lends to Israel via Israel Bonds (\$14 million) can be used for any development purpose, including the building of the notorious “separation” wall that is longer and higher than the old Berlin Wall and illegal settlements that displace Palestinian towns and farmers.

The \$18 million invested in Israeli stocks includes Israeli banks (which finance illegal settlements), NICE-systems (surveillance) and Africa-Israel (settlement builders).

Advocates for divestment have written on the subject to state Treasurer Denise Nappier over the years but without effect. Last October, Deputy Treasurer Christine Shaw defended the investments in Israel, saying “the underlying legal and policy basis for our approach remains sound.” That, of course, is beside the point.

Connecticut’s treasurers have applied moral principles in investment decisions in the past. In 1987, Connecticut divested from companies doing business with the then-apartheid South Africa. In 2006, Nappier herself spearheaded a Connecticut law that prohibited state funds being invested in Sudan because of massive killings by the government of Sudan in its Darfur region.

A growing coalition of Connecticut citizens and organizations are now asking why Connecticut continues to invest in Israel, despite its record of oppression. Are Palestinians lesser beings? This \$32 million of Connecticut employee pension money should be invested to develop Connecticut, not to aid oppression by the government of Israel.

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