

Presbytery of Boston  
Stated Meeting  
March 9, 2024

Petitions for Overtures and Concurrences to the 226th General Assembly

1. The Church of the Covenant asks the Presbytery of Boston to **send the following overture to the 226th General Assembly**: Calling for Action so that Children May Live Free from Gun Violence
2. The Church of the Covenant asks the Presbytery of Boston to **concur** with the Presbytery of Chicago on the overture “Confessing our Complicity in Christian Zionism Today,” with the highlighted additional rationale.
3. The Church of the Covenant asks the Presbytery of Boston to **send the following overture to the 226th General Assembly**: Direct MRTI to Begin Focused Engagement with General Electric and Palantir Technologies with Possible Divestment Recommendations
4. The Church of the Covenant asks the Presbytery of Boston to **send the following overture to the 226th General Assembly**: Educational Resources for Seeking Ways to End Israeli Apartheid
5. The Church of the Covenant asks the Presbytery of Boston to **concur** with the Presbytery of Susquehanna on the overture “Removal of investments in and subsidies for fossil fuels”

## **An Overture Calling for Action so that Children May Live Free from Gun Violence**

The Presbytery of \_\_\_\_\_ overtures the 226<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to:

**A. Call upon every congregation in the PC(U.S.A.) to take some specific action of love and responsibility for children as part of the movement to prevent gun violence.**

### **Action Suggestions for Congregations:**

- 1. Actively support and pray for** the emotional, spiritual and mental health needs of children as they grow up in an era of school lockdowns, active shooter drills and near-daily news of gun violence.
- 2. Promote Secure Gun Storage** - Churches of the PC(U.S.A.) can share information about the **Be SMART for Kids** campaign, which provides strategies and resources to protect children from unintentional firearm injury and death. Congregations are gifted at sharing safety information in their communities, which can include life-saving information on the importance of secure gun storage in every home where there is a gun. Congregations can offer free or low cost gun locks to church members, neighbors and others, and encourage schools to send secure gun storage information home in backpacks for parents.
- 3. Encourage Parents and Caregivers to Take Gun Safety Action**- Embolden parents and caretakers to always ask if there is a gun in a home and how it is stored before sending children to play in other homes. Churches can provide parents and caretakers with guidance on how to talk to children and adolescents about what to do if they discover unsecured guns and what to do if they know of a gun that has been brought to school, church or another gathering.
- 4. End Gun Marketing to Children** - Congregations can monitor and advocate with their retail stores to stop the “normalization” of firearms that happens in the mind of a child when guns are advertised to appeal directly to children and displayed in stores where children may see them. This includes the need for retailers to refrain from including toy guns in Easter baskets, Christmas displays and other ways that train children to acclimate to the presence of guns, such as the promotion of the youth-sized JR-15.
- 5. Promote Gun Security Technology** - Learn about and advocate for wide-spread use of existing technology that allows a gun to be fired only by the owner, preventing unintentional shootings, deterring gun theft and preventing youth and child suicide. Promote the use of biometric locks for secure gun storage, limiting access to the gun owner.
- 6. Act for Change** - Demonstrate to children that adults will act to protect them from gun violence: Participate in efforts such as Be SMART for Kids, Guns to Gardens, Violence Interruption Programs; support youth-led gun violence prevention organizations, and gun violence survivors and their families; engage in advocacy with elected officials for gun-sense regulation such as comprehensive background checks, a ban on the future sale of semiautomatic assault weapons and raising the age for gun purchases to 21 or older. Where appropriate, involve children, teens and youth in these efforts.
- 7. Vote** - As citizens, parents and grandparents, prayerfully prioritize the lives of America’s children in determining how to cast our individual votes in local, state and national elections.

**B. Additionally,** the 226th General Assembly calls upon the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness and the Presbyterian Decade to End Gun Violence to include secure gun storage and the other safety measures listed here in their ongoing gun violence prevention actions, advocacy and resources.

## RATIONALE

### Hearing Christ's Call:

In Luke 18, we see Jesus on the final journey to Jerusalem. Many adults had been besieging Jesus with questions and challenges. Suddenly Jesus is interrupted by parents who are bringing their children, the "little ones" who in first-century Herodian Palestine were overlooked and expendable. The caregivers seek a blessing, a promise of a safe place to belong, to grow free of harm. The disciples who have been following Jesus dismiss these vulnerable ones. Jesus is indignant, but replies with great kindness, "Let them come to me. They know what my Kin-dom looks like."

As disciples of Christ, we have the same call: to bless all God's children with a place to belong, to grow, to become strong and filled with wisdom and the grace of God (Luke 2: 40). Continuously since the 1968 General Assembly, the Presbyterian family has called upon our officials to save lives through a reasonable regulation of firearms to keep them away from those who may be a danger to themselves or others. The PCUSA has never called for the restriction of guns typically used in hunting or shooting sports. To these prior actions we add steps that local churches can take to protect children in particular.

### Acknowledging our Present Reality:

We cannot ignore or dismiss the present reality in the USA: more children are being traumatized, wounded, and killed by guns than by any other danger. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, since 2020 firearms have been the number one cause of death among children and teens in the United States, surpassing even car accidents.<sup>1</sup> From 2017 to 2021, child and teen gun fatalities increased by 40% to 4,739, the largest annual number ever recorded.<sup>2</sup> In addition to those who die, thousands more young people survive shootings each year with injuries that reverberate for months and years, and with ripple effects on parents, siblings and communities.

A recent Harvard study<sup>3</sup> shows that firearm deaths and injuries among youth exert a massive physical toll and mental health burden on survivors and their families. Financial costs are also high, with survivor health spending increasing by \$35,000 in the year following injury. Gun violence inflicts an enormous burden on children and on society, with a disproportionate danger for children of color.<sup>4</sup> When compared to communicable and infectious diseases, gun violence often poses a larger burden on society in terms of potential years of life lost, as well as the long term impact of trauma on individuals, families and communities. These costs are immeasurable and reverberate through generations.

### Recognizing causes and solutions:

**1. Unsecured Firearms:** The easy access to guns exacerbates the rise in child victims, including gun sales that may not include background checks. There is also an access crisis at the point of gun storage. In America, 4.6 million children live in homes with guns that are both loaded and unlocked, and this number is growing.<sup>5</sup> Secure gun storage saves lives. **Solutions that congregations can participate in:**

**A. The Be SMART for Kids Campaign** has been promoted nationwide and utilized by major hospitals, healthcare systems, the American Academy of Pediatrics, law enforcement agencies and schools. Community partners include national organizations like Injury Free Coalition for Kids, Safe Kids Worldwide, National PTA, as well as numerous other state and local partners.

SMART is an acronym that stands for:

S: Secure all guns in your home and vehicles.

M: Model responsible behavior around guns.

A: Ask about the presence of unsecured guns in other homes..

R: Recognize the role of guns in suicide.

T: Tell your peers to be SMART.

Congregations can join in monthly BeSMART conference calls and use printable resources that include:

- Asking about Secure Gun Storage*, with examples of effective conversation-starters.
- Keeping Your Home Safe with Secure Storage*, which show how gun owners don't need to choose between storing guns securely and maintaining quick access to them if necessary.
- Secure Storage Toolkit*, a guide to getting secure storage resolutions passed within school districts.
- Talking to Your Children about Guns*, a guide that includes specific tips for young children, adolescents.

Learn more at <https://besmartforkids.org/>

Additional Secure Storage Resources:

- Order Gun Safety Cards and the Gun Violence Prevention Congregational Toolkit (2024 Edition) from [www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence](http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/gun-violence) (See Section 3: Action)
- Free cable locks for small firearms can be obtained at most local Veterans Administration facilities.

**B. Normalize the Ask and Talk about Gun Safety:** Child lives can be saved if parents and caregivers will regularly ask friends or neighbors about gun storage in homes where children may visit. Find information on "normalizing the ask" at: <https://www.bradyunited.org/program/end-family-fire/asking-saves-kids> and at [https://besmartforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Asking-About-Secure-Gun-Storage\\_09.2023.pdf](https://besmartforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Asking-About-Secure-Gun-Storage_09.2023.pdf) While it is always an adult's responsibility to prevent unauthorized access to guns and not a curious child's responsibility to avoid guns, we must talk with children about gun safety. Incorporate the conversation about guns regularly, just as you would about other crucial safety issues. Make sure they understand that any situation where there is an unsupervised gun is a dangerous situation. Simple language could include "If you see a gun, don't touch it. Tell an adult right away." Tell children not to touch a gun, even if it looks like a toy. They should always assume a gun is loaded, and they should tell an adult immediately.

We know that talking to children about guns is only a precaution, not a guarantee of safety. One study found that young children who go through a week-long gun safety training are *just as likely* as children with no training to approach or play with a handgun when they find one.<sup>6</sup> The gun lobby is promoting legislation that requires the National Rifle Association's "Eddie the Eagle" program in schools. This program was deemed ineffective by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Alternatively, schools can pass secure storage resolutions, notifying parents of the importance of secure storage. The Be SMART for Kids program provides a toolkit as a guide for this action.

**C. State Legislation:** In addition to supporting a federal secure storage law, congregations can learn about those states that have already adopted laws to hold gun owners accountable for secure storage. States with secure storage laws have lower rates of child gun violence, including child suicide. In these states, the rate of gun suicide among young people ages 10 to 24 was lower in 2022 than in 1999. In states with no secure storage laws, the rate increased 36% during that time.<sup>7</sup> Congregations have access to their state officials and can learn about gun safety legislation in their state at <https://everytownresearch.org/rankings/>

**D. Preventing School Shootings:** In addition to reducing child suicide and unintentional shootings, promoting a culture of secure gun storage can reduce school shootings. The US Secret Service has undertaken studies of targeted school violence, covering nearly 40 years of incidents. They found that 3/4 of school shooters simply took an unsecured firearm from the home of a parent or close relative. The number is even higher with school shooters under the age of 18 taking unsecured guns to commit school shootings.<sup>8</sup> Secure gun storage can help prevent school shootings.

## Confessing our Complicity in Christian Zionism Today

### Recommendation:

The Presbytery of Boston overtures the 226<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to the PC(USA) 2024 to update and expand on the Resolution confronting Christian Zionism approved in 2004. Specifically, we call upon the General Assembly through the Office of Theology, Formation and Evangelism to:

- A. Reject Christian Zionism in all its forms
  1. See Appendix A - 2004 Resolution on Rejecting Christian Zionism
  2. Acknowledge the expansion of Christian Zionism in all its forms
- B. Issue a study document that addresses the expansion of Christian Zionism since our 2004 policy, including the following:
  1. Provides a record of General Assembly Resolutions dealing with Israel and Palestine since 2004;
  2. Covers the ways the heretical views of Christian Zionism have been expanded since our 2004 resolution, notably:
    - a. How mainstream Christianity implicitly and sometimes explicitly links the State of Israel to biblical views of Scripture's "promised land;"
    - b. The Global spread and adoption of Christian Zionism which focuses simply on the State of Israel as the Biblical kingdom; and
    - c. The growing understanding of settler colonialism with reference to the Doctrine of Discovery —rather than a conflict and occupation— showing how mainline Christians and those of other faiths are complicit, though unaware of connections with Zionism;
  3. Points to a biblical theology based on the Ten Commandments (Decalogue), a core requirement of Judaism, as it is found today in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Exodus 20:17 makes it clear that you shall "...not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." This directly contradicts the ideology that justifies taking land and displacing the indigenous people. All neighbors are to be treated with respect.
- C. Call upon the General Assembly through the office of World Mission to work with our partners across the world, who are also confronting the spread of Christian Zionism in their contexts, and convening spaces where experiences and resources can be shared through networks built to counter the spread of Christian Zionism globally. This would include holding events with partners in the United States, Africa and Asia where Christian Zionism is spreading.
- D. Call upon people of faith to advocate for a just peace with full and equal human rights for all the people in Palestine and Israel.

## Rationale

**A. Rejecting Christian Zionism.** We must reject Christian Zionism in all its forms. This rationale lists the many ways it has developed since 2004 and calls for a Study Document to assist the church in its understanding. Twenty years ago our denomination denounced as a heresy the theology undergirding Christian Zionism. As summarized by the Stated Clerk, Clifton Kirkpatrick in 2004:

The assembly declared that Christian Zionism is not consistent with the basic values of Reformed theology because it makes use of idiosyncratic interpretations of Scripture to undergird a certain reading of current events, and to generate support for specific political goals that do not bolster work toward peace and potentially endanger Palestinian and Israeli people.[\[1\]](#)

Kirkpatrick went on to note that the Resolution did not invite comparison of Israeli policies to those of apartheid South Africa and that the Assembly had not asserted any moral equivalency between the two at that time. That has changed and our understanding of Zionism and how it relates to “settler colonialism” has also changed. We need new study materials to understand this fully. That new study would address the issues listed in part B of the Overture, as follows.

**A. II. *Rejecting Antisemitism in all its forms and affirming our vital interfaith partnerships (ECU-06).*** *It is essential to restate our denomination’s long and consistent commitment to reject all forms of antisemitism in the world, especially when making any statements related to Israel / Palestine. We also continue to affirm our longstanding commitments of loving solidarity with our Jewish siblings in faith in Israel/ Palestine/ Middle East and here in the United States and our communities. This overture restates these commitments. This overture also makes it clear that rejecting the theology of Christian Zionism is primarily a critique of fellow Christians. Any related critiques of some political and militaristic leadership in Israel (and the United States) that is connected to such ideologies and theologies is not antisemitism.*

**A. III. *Rejecting Islamophobia in all its forms and affirming our vital interfaith partnerships (ECU-06).*** *This overture also includes an underlying rejection of all forms of Islamophobia in consistency with our denomination’s practice. We likewise affirm our longstanding commitments to vital and loving interfaith relationships with our Muslim siblings in Palestine/ Israel/ Middle East and here in the United States.*

**B. I. Our History of Complicity in Christian Zionism.** The theology of Christian Zionism, held by many millions of American Evangelicals, flourishes in many parts of the U.S., Asia, South America, and Africa. It is “gospel” to those who support Israel’s conquest and dispossession of Palestinians at any cost, in order to “return the Jews to the land of Is\rael and bring about the final battle of Armageddon so that our Messiah can return.” This is pure imperial theology which rose out of the British Empire but was taken to its current heights by US evangelicals.

Today, it is clear that mainline protestants are also complicit in this theology that oppresses and erases Palestinians but also exploits Jews. Here is an overview of the theology:

Christian Zionism (CZ hereafter) is a political and theological entity that uses Christian texts to support the modern nation-state of Israel out of the belief that Israel has a cosmic

purpose to bring about the “End Times” which will culminate in the second coming of Jesus and the end of the world. CZ theology holds that Israel must gather all the Jews of the world, enlarge its territory, destroy Muslim holy places, and ethnically cleanse “the holy land” of all non-Jews. About 1/3 of evangelical Christians in the US believe that support for such actions from Israel will help hasten the desired end of the world. While most theologians consider it heresy, many Christians hold this far-right ideology without realizing its implications. [\[2\]](#)

**B.2.How Zionism has expanded.** Zionism is a political ideology that has been used by Israel to legitimize its “settler colonial” policies and practices today. It didn’t start out that way, but it is clearly in effect today. Jews needed a safe place to land because of the Holocaust of mass extermination of Jews and others and because Western powers would not admit them as refugees in numbers that would accommodate those fleeing Nazi rule. Christian guilt over complicity in persecuting Jews over a long history of antisemitism hastened their agreement to establish Jewish rights to live in Palestine. The Western practice of colonialism (ruling a land temporarily to use its resources) was just beginning to unravel at the end of WW II in 1945, but it did not stop the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.

Since 1967, Israeli leaders have used Zionism to justify taking land from Palestinians. This practice is called “settler colonialism,” the practice of taking land and pushing out indigenous people. This has accelerated since 2000 under the leadership of the current Prime Minister of Israel. Israeli leaders have established a theme of religious justification to take over land that belonged to Palestinians.

**B.3. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).** The UDHR was adopted in 1948 and calls for equal human rights for everyone. Christians recognize its validity from the Ten Commandments; Exodus 20:17 makes it clear that you shall “...not covet your slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” All neighbors are to be treated with respect.

**C. Call on the Office of World Mission (WM) to work with partners to confront the spread of CZ** WM has partners to work with who are also confronting CZ in their contexts. WM should convene spaces where experiences and resources can be shared to counter the spread of CZ globally. Specifically, such conferences should be held in Asia, Africa, South America and the US.

**D. Advocate for a just peace with full and equal human rights for all the people in Palestine and Israel.** Recognizing the rights of all people and showing solidarity for all, Jewish Voice for Peace concludes their position paper, *Our Approach to Zionism*,[\[3\]](#) with these words:

Rather than accept the inevitability of occupation and dispossession, we choose a different path. We learn from the anti-Zionism Jews who came before us, and know that as long as Zionism has existed, so has Jewish dissent to it. Especially as we face the violent antisemitism fueled by white nationalism in the US today, we choose solidarity. We choose collective liberation. We choose a future where everyone, including Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, can live their lives freely in vibrant, safe, equitable communities, with basic human needs fulfilled. Join us.

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[1] “Statement from the Stated Clerk concerning the 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly regarding Israel and Palestine and outreach to Jewish people,” 7.20.2004, an Appendix, published in church and Society, PC(USA), Vol. 95, No. 1

[2] FOSNA.org (Friends of Sabeel North America), an ecumenical group of Christians supporting Palestinian Christians.

[3] “Our Approach to Zionism,” Jewish Voice for Peace. <https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/resource/Zionism/>



**The Presbytery of \_\_\_\_\_ overtures the 226<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:**

1. Direct the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) to begin focused engagement with General Electric (GE) and Palantir Technologies, Inc. in the 2025 and 2026 proxy seasons and to report back to the 227<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2026) with possible divestment recommendations for the companies that are not moving toward compliance with established General Assembly policies.

**Rationale**

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has long recognized that church investment is “more than a practical question”—it is also “an instrument of mission.”<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the PC(USA) has identified various criteria for evaluating our corporate investments for divestment and/or proscription. The two companies identified in this overture, General Electric and Palantir Technologies, are both involved in activities that bring them into direct conflict with our policy of mission-directed investment.

**Military-Related Production, Human Rights, and Divestment**

The PC(USA) has identified a broad range of concerns that can qualify a company as a candidate for divestment and/or proscription. The 2023 General Assembly Divestment/Proscription List notes, “The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) urges divestment and/or proscription of some corporations due to their involvement in military-related production (MR), tobacco (TO), human rights violations (HR), environmental concerns (EN) and operating for-profit prisons (FPP).”<sup>2</sup> The most relevant of these divestment/proscription criteria when considering corporate engagement with these two companies are military-related production and human rights violations.

Regarding military-related production, the divestment/proscription list identifies several guidelines and considerations for identifying candidates for divestment and/or proscription. For these companies, the most relevant is “the sale of weapons to states involved in armed conflicts where there are heightened risks of those weapons being used in ways that constitute serious and systematic violations of international humanitarian law (IHL).”<sup>3</sup>

As far as human rights violations are concerned, the Divestment/Proscription List notes,

It is in conflict-affected and high-risk areas (CAHRA), characterized by widespread human rights abuses and violations of national or international law, that people are most vulnerable to violations of their human rights. CAHRA may include international armed conflict ...; internal armed conflict ...; and military occupations (e.g., Occupied Palestinian Territories) or other areas of heightened risk .... Companies operating in CAHRA are at greater risk of causing, contributing to, or being directly linked with human rights harms, as defined by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Divestment/Proscription List does not provide specific examples, leading violations of human rights necessarily include the policies and practices of apartheid. As both the UN's International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (1974) and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) have declared, “apartheid is a crime against humanity.”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, it is clear that companies providing material support to the maintenance and perpetuation of apartheid are complicit in crimes against humanity.

In this regard it is relevant to recall the overture approved in 2022 by the 225<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, which called upon that body to:

Recognize that the government of Israel's laws, policies, and practices regarding the Palestinian people fulfill the international legal definition of apartheid. Apartheid is legally defined as inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them.<sup>6</sup>

That overture further urged "members, congregations, presbyteries, and national staff units, including the Office of Interfaith Relations, to seek appropriate ways to bring an end to Israeli apartheid."<sup>7</sup> It is also relevant to note that the three companies identified for divestment in the 2014 overture "On Divestment from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, and Motorola Solutions" all appear in the Divestment/Proscription List under the heading "Human Rights Violation."<sup>8</sup>

### **General Assembly Policy on the Israeli Occupation of Palestinian Territory**

Our denomination has repeatedly called for "the government of Israel to put an end to its military, political, and economic occupation of Palestinian land after 1967 and its practice of establishing and expanding settlements there."<sup>9</sup> And flowing from that position, since 2004 we have repeatedly insisted that, when evaluating our congregation's corporate engagement in Israel/Palestine, we need to focus on the profit that companies derive from the occupation and the violence that maintains it:

- The 216<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2004) concluded, given the continuing occupation and expansion of settlements by Israel, that the church needed to determine which of its investments profited from the occupation, thereby raising questions of moral integrity for the church. It also stated "selective, phased divestment" aimed at companies that supported the occupation (not Israeli companies in general) should be implemented.<sup>10</sup>
- The 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2006) recommended that "financial investments of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as they pertain to Israel, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank, be invested in only peaceful pursuits," and stated that "the customary corporate engagement process of the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment ... is the proper vehicle for achieving this goal."<sup>11</sup>
- 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (GA 2008) resolved to: "Call upon all corporations doing business in the region to confine their business activity solely to peaceful pursuits, and refrain from allowing their products or services to support or facilitate violent acts by Israelis or Palestinians against innocent civilians, construction and maintenance of settlements or Israeli-only roads in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory, and construction of the Separation Barrier as it extends beyond the 1967 'Green Line' into Palestinian territories."<sup>12</sup>
- And the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (2014), after years of futile corporate engagement, instructed the Presbyterian Foundation and the Board of Pensions of the PC(USA), to divest from three companies that were providing material assistance to the occupation: Caterpillar, Inc., Hewlett Packard, and Motorola Solutions.<sup>13</sup>

## General Electric (GE)<sup>14</sup>

General Electric is a vast multinational corporation involved in a wide variety of activities. Its revenues in 2022 totaled \$76.6 billion, of which its “defense revenue” of \$4.4 billion constituted a fraction (7%). Still, that portion was large enough to earn it the 25<sup>th</sup> spot in the 2023 list of the top “100 Defense Companies” compiled by *Defense News*.<sup>15</sup>

Currently, the corporation is splitting into three separate public companies: GE Aerospace, GE Healthcare, and GE Vernova (focused on renewable energy, power, and digital)—a split that is to be completed by 2024.<sup>16</sup> No doubt, most of its military production in the future will be handled by GE Aerospace. That unit within General Electric boasts, “As a leader in aviation technology, GE Aerospace continues to design, develop and manufacture jet engines, components and integrated systems for military, commercial and business and general aircraft as well as aero-derivative gas turbines for marine applications.”<sup>17</sup>

### ***General Electric’s Military-Related Production and Human Rights Violations in Israel/Palestine***

Many of GE’s military products, frequently gifted to Israel through the U.S. government’s Foreign Military Financing program, find their way into Israel’s military arsenal.<sup>18</sup> For years, these have been essential components in the weapons that are regularly used in Israel’s assaults on Palestinian civilians and on their homes, schools, and hospitals.

GE’s F110-GE-129 engines can be found in all Boeing F-15 and Lockheed Martin F-16 fighter jets. Also, GE’s electronic components are included in the Lockheed Martin F-35 stealth fighter jets. These are planes the Israeli Air Force uses regularly in its strikes on Gaza.<sup>19</sup> For example:

- On Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas fighters launched a despicable attack that, as of Nov. 1, took the lives of at least 1,400 Israelis and foreign nationals, including at least 31 children, and that captured 240 hostages. As of Nov. 1, Israel’s massive retaliation had killed 8,805 Palestinians, including at least 3,648 children.<sup>20</sup> F-15, F-16, and F-35 fighter jets have been employed extensively in the bombing.<sup>21</sup> According to an eyewitness report, it was an F-16 that launched the devastating missile attack on the Jabalya refugee camp on Oct. 31 that, together with the second attack on the camp on Nov. 1, killed at least 195 people.<sup>22</sup>

The United Nations and prominent human rights organizations—including Amnesty International, B’tselem, and Human Rights Watch—have charged Hamas with war crimes for its indiscriminate killing of civilians and its abductions. But all have also condemned Israel for its probable war crimes, including its bombing of Gaza.<sup>23</sup> Regarding this bombardment, Amnesty International has documented “unlawful Israeli attacks, including indiscriminate attacks, which caused mass civilian casualties and must be investigated as war crimes.”<sup>24</sup> And the Israeli Human Rights organization B’tselem has asserted that “a criminal policy of revenge is underway,” in the dropping of “hundreds of tons” of bombs on Gaza.<sup>25</sup>

Concerning Hamas, it should be noted that in 2005 MRTI initiated engagement with Citigroup for potential divestment because of an allegation “Citigroup had provided insufficient controls to prevent the transfer of funds to Palestinian organizations supporting violence.” When Citibank representatives provided assurance it had robust controls to prevent questionable transfers, when there were no further reports of questionable transfers, and when Citigroup expressed willingness to explore

microcredit lending in Palestine, MRTI removed Citigroup from its focus list of companies for corporate engagement in 2007.<sup>26</sup> The PC(USA) does not currently invest in any companies that are connected to Hamas.

- F-16s were used extensively in the airstrikes on Gaza in 2021. They demolished a building containing residential apartments; destroyed the offices of news organizations, including Al Jazeera and the Associated Press; and inflicted severe damage on the Rimal neighborhood in Gaza City.<sup>27</sup>
- F-16 jets were responsible for much of the aerial bombardment in the 2014 campaign against Gaza.<sup>28</sup> In that attack more than 2,200 Palestinians—more than half of them civilians, and approximately a quarter of them children—were killed.<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch observed, “Such attacks committed deliberately or recklessly constitute war crimes under the laws of war applicable to all parties.”<sup>30</sup>
- During the December 2008 – January 2009 attacks, Israeli F-16 bombing of civilians and civilian sites, including a refugee camp, was responsible for many deaths. The UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict reports that in one strike from an F-16, 22 members of single family, including 12 children, were killed. According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, more than 1,400 Palestinians, including 926 civilians were killed during the campaign.<sup>31</sup>

F-15s, with their GE-made engines, were also used in each of those operations against Gaza.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, GE’s T700 engines are employed in The Black Hawk and Apache combat helicopters manufactured by Boeing and in the SH-60F Seahawk helicopters produced by Lockheed Martin. Also, GE’s T408 engines are used in the Lockheed Martin CH-53K heavy-lift helicopters.<sup>33</sup> All these helicopters have been provided to Israel as part of the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program. The Apaches have been most prominent in Israel’s military operations against Palestinians. They were used by Israel in the July 2023 bombing within the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank in which at least five Palestinians were killed and 91 were wounded; and they were used in the West Bank on at least four occasions during 2002.<sup>34</sup> The same helicopters, armed with Hellfire missiles and machine guns, have been used in all Israel’s major assaults on Gaza, where they have repeatedly targeted civilians.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, LM2500 produced by GE is the turbine part in the Sa’ar 5 warship with which the Israeli Navy enforces the naval blockade of Gaza.<sup>36</sup> Israel restricts Gazan fishermen to an area that varies from 15 to as little as three nautical miles off the coast, severely limiting their access to fishing.<sup>37</sup> Even within these limits, Israel’s Navy often attacks Gazan fishermen for simply getting too close to the imaginary line in the sea. Additionally, in 2010 a Sa’ar ship was employed in the assault on the Gaza Freedom flotilla in which nine human rights activists were killed. According to the International Criminal Court’s chief prosecutor, “there is a reasonable basis to believe that war crimes were committed” during that attack.<sup>38</sup>

### ***General Electric’s Violations of Human Rights in the Golan Heights, Iraq, Yemen, and China***

GE is exposed, through the company’s operations and value chain relationships, to risks of contributing to or being linked with human rights abuses in a number of other CAHRA.

GE has been connected to human rights abuses and violations of international law in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, for example, by providing wind turbines for the Genesis Wind project.<sup>39</sup> International law recognizes the Golan Heights as Syrian territory, but Israel has occupied it since 1967 and illegally annexed it in 1981. Eight illegal Israeli settlements are partners in the project. Members of the indigenous Druze population have protested the project for its infringement on their land rights, for threatening their agrarian way of life, for “greenwashing” the illegal occupation, for unfairly providing financial benefits only to Israel and Israeli firms, and for endangering the local bird population.<sup>40</sup>

General Electric has also contributed to Iraq's ongoing energy crisis. After receiving an initial \$5 billion contract from the Pentagon to manage Iraq's electricity grid, and subsequently several billion dollars in additional contracts, GE has failed to provide more than twelve hours of electricity per day to Iraqis. The company has also insisted on using non-renewable forms of energy, as it holds a near monopoly grip on the country's electricity sector.<sup>41</sup>

General Electric has been working in partnership with the Royal Saudi Air Force, which has been implicated in the commission of war crimes in Yemen. The company provides Saudi Arabia with F110 engines, which are used in F-15 combat jets, and T700 engines, which are used by Black Hawk and Apache attack helicopters. GE also works with the Saudi Air Force to service these engines throughout their lifespan. According to the human rights organization, PAX, which extensively researched GE's relationship with Saudi Arabia, the company “should be seen as ‘contributing’ to the [human rights] violations in Yemen, because by providing the military systems that build the military capacities of these states, they *facilitated* the violation by providing the means for the specific violations of international humanitarian law.”<sup>42</sup>

Finally, General Electric is connected through its supply chain to the forced migration and forced labor of the Uyghur minority population in China. GE is a customer of Dongguan Yidong Electronic Co. Ltd., a supplier with factories in China that participate in the forced transfer, re-education, and exploitation of the Uyghur population. A report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute claims,

more than 80,000 Uyghurs were transferred out of Xinjiang to work in factories across China between 2017 and 2019, and some of them were sent directly from detention camps...In factories far away from home, they typically live in segregated dormitories, undergo organized Mandarin and ideological training outside working hours, are subject to constant surveillance, and are forbidden from participating in religious observances. Numerous sources, including government documents, show that transferred workers are assigned minders and have limited freedom of movement.<sup>43</sup>

### **Palantir Technologies, Inc.**<sup>44</sup>

Palantir Technologies is a software company that develops technology used in machine-assisted and human-driven data analysis. It had revenue of \$2.05 billion in the twelve months ending June 30, 2023. Palantir was created in 2004 with start-up money provided by In-Q-Tel, the CIA's venture capital branch. Palantir's co-founder and director is the billionaire Peter Thiel, a frequent contributor to right-wing causes. The company offers four main products:

- **Gotham**, Palantir's main product, is a platform for data integration and analysis that is used by government agencies, financial firms, and other organizations to

make sense of large amounts of data. It was developed for military and intelligence agencies.

- **Foundry** is a platform for data integration and analysis that is designed for use by businesses. Palantir Foundry is a cloud-based platform that allows organizations to integrate, manage, and analyze data from a variety of sources.
- **Apollo** was created to help supply chain management and logistics.
- **Metropolis**, is a platform for data analysis in the finance industry.<sup>45</sup>

Palantir's Gotham platform is one of the main systems used internationally and in the U.S. for predictive policing. Such systems utilize a vast amount of personal information to map relationships between individuals, organizations, websites, etc.

### ***Palantir's Military-Related Production and Human Rights Violations in Israel/Palestine***

Palantir's leading international clients include Israel's security forces, which use Palantir's predictive systems to identify individuals who are considered to be a "threat." According to a 2017 article in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, there are only two companies that provide predictive systems used for intelligence at Israeli security organizations—Fifth Dimension and Palantir Technologies Inc. Using this technology, according to *Haaretz*, "Israel jails Palestinians because they fit the 'terrorist profile.'" As one officer commented at an IDF briefing in 2016, "Unlike terrorists who belong to Hamas or the Islamic Jihad, if you get to their house a week before the attack the kid doesn't know that he is a terrorist yet."<sup>46</sup>

By its participation in police profiling, Palantir Technologies contributes to the mass incarceration of Palestinians, including children. According to Addameer, the Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, since Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory in 1967, more than 800,000 Palestinians have been imprisoned under Israeli military orders in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). "This number constitutes approximately 20 percent of the total Palestinian population in the OPT and as much as 40 percent of the total male Palestinian population."<sup>47</sup>

### ***Palantir's Contribution to Human Rights Violations against Undocumented Migrants and Asylum Seekers in the United States***

Palantir's products also contribute to human rights violations in the United States and on the U.S.-Mexico border, as they are used in U.S. immigrant surveillance and targeting. A report from Amnesty International issued in 2020 concluded, "there is a high risk that Palantir is contributing to serious human rights violations of migrants and asylum-seekers."<sup>48</sup> From 2008 to 2021, Palantir was awarded a total of \$186.6 million by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which has used its products to help carry out workplace raids, deportations, and separate migrant families, according to the Latinx and Chicanx rights organization Mijente.<sup>49</sup> Palantir developed the Investigative Case Management System (ICM) tool, which has been used by ICE to help separate immigrant families and build cases against migrants slated for deportation.

Palantir's "FALCON" product has been used by ICE to help conduct workplace raids against undocumented migrants.<sup>50</sup> In 2016, a Palantir employee provided direct support to ICE agents to use FALCON in a massive no-knock raid that resulted in the detention of 120 people, only three of whom ended up being charged with a crime.<sup>51</sup> The FALCON app was also used to raid multiple 7-Eleven stores in New York City in 2018.<sup>52</sup> And ICE officials used FALCON to help arrest 680 people at a chicken processing plant in Mississippi in 2019.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Palantir's Contributions to Human Rights Abuses Committed by American Police Forces***

In addition to the Israeli military, several US police departments use Palantir's Gotham tool for data management. Palantir also provides predictive policing technology to various law enforcement agencies in the United States, a practice that is widely recognized as racist.<sup>54</sup> According to the American Friends Service Committee, "Palantir's predictive policing tool analyzes patterns in people's routines, associations, and activities, and highlights suspicious patterns that potentially resemble those of people associated with crime and gang activity, even if there are no indications of actual crime involvement. This allows law enforcement to criminalize people and communities based on patterns of associations, leading to disproportionately negative effects on over-policed and criminalized communities, privacy concerns, and a lack of transparency."<sup>55</sup>

### ***Palantir's Contributions to the U.S. Military***

Palantir's largest client is the U.S. military, as the company has garnered more than \$600 million in Pentagon contracts since 2008. The primary tools Palantir contributes to the military are artificial intelligence and machine learning technology. Since 2018, Palantir has worked with the Pentagon on "Project Maven," an "initiative to deploy autonomous AI drones that can track vehicles and people, with the goal of sending those drones to combat zones to help the military prioritize targets and plan raids," according to the AFSC.<sup>56</sup>

### **Conclusions**

Both General Electric and Palantir Technologies are clearly involved in activities that conflict with the mission-directed investment policy of the Presbyterian Church (USA). GE, a leader in military-related production, creates various essential components for the war machines used by Israel against Palestinians and Saudi Arabia against Yemen. These weapons are crucial to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and to the perpetuation of Israeli apartheid, and they have been used repeatedly in war crimes. The company's products contribute to the energy crisis in Iraq and human rights abuses in the Golan Heights and China. Palantir Technology's products are regularly utilized to maintain the occupation of Palestinian territories and the system of Israeli apartheid by targeting Palestinians for surveillance and arrest based on police profiles. The same products are used by ICE in the U.S. to identify and deport migrants and asylum seekers, and by local police departments for profiling.

For this reason, we urge the General Assembly to direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board to instruct the committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) to begin a focused engagement process with General Electric (GE) and Palantir Technologies, Inc. with the aim of moving these companies away from actions that create human harm, that are a barrier to peace, and that violate human rights.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Office of Faith-Based Investing and Corporate Engagement, Presbyterian Church (USA), <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/mrti/>.

<sup>2</sup> PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA) 2023 General Assembly Divestment/ Proscription List Effective January 1, 2023, p. 1. [APPROVED-MRTI-2023-GA-Long-Form-Divestment-List.pdf](https://www.presbyterianmission.org/approved-mrti-2023-ga-long-form-divestment-list.pdf) ([presbyterianmission.org](https://www.presbyterianmission.org))

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 7.



<sup>5</sup> International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (1974), [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.10\\_International%20Convention%20on%20the%20Suppression%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Apartheid.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.10_International%20Convention%20on%20the%20Suppression%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Apartheid.pdf); Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998), [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court | OHCHR](https://www.un.org/en/rst/statute/rome-statute-of-the-international-criminal-court-1998).

<sup>6</sup> On Recognition That Israel's Laws, Policies, and Practices Constitute Apartheid Against the Palestinian People, Overture from the Presbytery of Grace to the 225th General Assembly (2022).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Aspects of Israel's apartheid system that were noted in the overture include,

- a. Establishing two sets of laws, one for Israelis and one for Palestinians, which give preferential treatment to Israeli Jews and oppressive treatment to Palestinians,
- b. Expropriating Palestinian land and water for Jewish-only settlements.
- c. Denying the right to freedom of residence to Palestinians.
- d. Dividing the population along racial lines by the creation of separate reserves and ghettos for the Palestinians.
- e. Denying Palestinians the right to a nationality.

<sup>8</sup> PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA) 2023 General Assembly Divestment/ Proscription List Effective January 1, 2023, p. 4. [APPROVED-MRTI-2023-GA-Long-Form-Divestment-List.pdf \(presbyterianmission.org\)](https://www.presbyterianmission.org/approved-mrti-2023-ga-long-form-divestment-list.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Breaking Down the Walls," 219TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2010) of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.), pp. 25. [BreakingDowntheWalls-GAapproved.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](https://www.squarespace.com/breaking-down-the-walls-ga-approved.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> "Breaking Down the Walls, as approved by the 2019<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)" p. 53.

[https://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/breaking\\_down\\_the\\_walls\\_ga219.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/breaking_down_the_walls_ga219.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> "Breaking Down the Walls, as approved by the 2019<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)" p. 53.

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<sup>12</sup> Mission Responsibility Through Investment Report and Recommendations to the 221st General Assembly (2014): Engagement with Corporations on Israel-Palestine Issues from 2004 – 2013, p.3. [2014\\_mrti\\_report\\_on\\_i-p\\_corp\\_engage-1-9\\_final.pdf \(pcusa.org\)](https://www.pcusa.org/2014_mrti_report_on_i-p_corp_engage-1-9_final.pdf).

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<sup>14</sup> Much of the following section utilizes the research report "General Electric Co.," on the American Friends Service Committee's Investigate website, <https://investigate.afsc.org/company/general-electric>.

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## Educational Resources for Seeking Ways to End Israeli Apartheid

### RECOMMENDATION

The \_\_\_\_\_ Presbytery overtures the 227th (2024) General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:

1. Inform members, congregations, presbyteries, and national staff of the following two educational resources that can be used to equip PCUSA members and entities on understanding Israeli apartheid in the broader framework of European colonialism.
  - a. *Why Palestine Matters, The Struggle To End Colonialism*. by the Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church USA.
  - b. *Focus: Palestine*, by the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
2. Urge members, congregations, presbyteries, and national staff, including the Office of Interfaith Relations, to seek appropriate ways to bring an end to Israeli apartheid, including equipping Presbyterians with knowledge of the Israeli laws and policies that constitute apartheid.
3. Direct the Stated Clerk to communicate this action to all PC(USA) agencies, mid-councils, and congregations.

### RATIONALE

The PCUSA General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed Israel's right to exist as a sovereign nation within secure and internationally recognized borders in accordance with United Nations resolutions. It has also declared its support for a free, viable, and secure state for the Palestinian people.

From 2004 to 2022 the General Assembly has passed 3 major reports and 20 overtures regarding Israel-Palestine which urged that Israel end its occupation of Palestinian territories and come into full compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by granting full human rights to Palestinians living in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

During that time frame the Palestinians suffered increased oppression and restriction of basic human rights. Today in Israel/Palestine 15 million people live under the control of the Israeli government, but with one set of laws for Jews who comprise half the population and another different set of laws that apply to the Palestinian who comprise the other half of the population.

The 225<sup>th</sup> (2022) General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognized that Israel's laws, policies, and practices regarding the Palestinian people fulfill the international legal definition of apartheid. Apartheid is legally defined as inhumane acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial or ethnic group of persons over any other group of persons, and then systematically oppressing them to maintain supremacy by having different sets of laws for different groups of people. This overture was passed with the hope it will lead to a peaceful reconciliation for the people of Israel and Palestine like that which occurred in South Africa when apartheid was internationally acknowledged.

The General Assembly also urges members, congregations, presbyteries, and national staff, including the Office of Interfaith Relations, to seek appropriate ways to bring an end to Israeli apartheid.

To that end, This overture informs Presbyterians of two educational resources to assist their understanding of Israeli apartheid in the broader framework of European colonialism and placing Israel/Palestine issues in a global context.

Israel's apartheid laws and actions are not unique; they are part of a 400-year period of colonization when European powers raced to colonize other continents, exploit them for resources, and permanently occupy lands of the indigenous people. In many cases the colonists appropriated culture and stole land and resources resulting in erasure of the indigenous peoples.

By the 1880's, colonialism was seen by many European powers as an acceptable practice as many of them had colonies on other continents. It was in this atmosphere of colonization, land appropriation, and displacement of indigenous people that Zionism was born. A political ideology that grew out of a need for a security, Zionism was created mostly by European Jews advocating for a homeland where Jews would be safe. Reacting to European antisemitism, European Jews were encouraged to colonize the lands of biblical Israel, which had been continuously inhabited by another group of people for millennia.

By the early 1900's, many people in Europe and around the world were questioning the theft within colonialism, the oppression of indigenous peoples, and the moral justification for having one ethnic group dominate another. During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson promoted 14 points toward the rebuilding of the postwar world. These points embraced the concept of national self-determination, the dismantling of European empires, the creation of new independent states, and an end to colonialism.

It took another world war for this vision to begin to be realized. The United Nations was formed in 1945 and members declared an end to colonialism as well as the gradual liberation of colonial territories becoming independent nations. At the very time when European powers were ending the age of colonization, the Zionist movement was promoting a new colonial project, one which advocated a homeland for Jews from around the world and called for an in-gathering of world Jewry to settle Palestine. This project would ultimately replace indigenous Palestinians who lived there by moving out as many Palestinians as possible.

Viewed within the framework of colonialism, the Zionist movement was not unique. The renown historian Tony Judt, a British Jew who emigrated to the US after WWII, said in 2003 that colonization of the territory currently occupied by Israel was an anachronism because it came too late. He stated: "The problem with Israel, in short, is not—as is sometimes suggested—that it is a European "enclave" in the Arab world; but rather that it arrived too late. It has imported a characteristically late-nineteenth-century separatist project into a world that has moved on, a world of individual rights, open frontiers, and international law." <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2003/10/23/israel-the-alternative/>

The post World War II colonization of Palestine largely took place after the United Nations approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, explicitly stating that forcibly replacing indigenous populations with settlers from another country was against international law.

In May 1948, Israel declared statehood and signed the UN Charter as a member. But it continued its colonization of Palestine through forced evacuations of the resident Palestinians, and expropriation of their land, and the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages.

By 1967, European nations had given up most of their colonies who were asking for independence. In that same year, Israel invaded the West Bank of Palestine and started Jewish-only settlement colonies that now house more than 500,000 people. As the world was leaving colonization behind, Israel was embracing it and creating colonies at a breakneck pace.

By viewing Israel's current laws and policies within the context of colonialism, we avoid demonizing Israel and the origins of Zionism. Rather, by looking through the lens of colonialism, we can find many examples of countries who have successfully ended their colonial era and that have or are trying to reconcile with the people they once oppressed or exploited, such as Afrikaners and indigenous blacks in South Africa or New Zealand settlers and indigenous Mauri tribes. It is hoped that this understanding will help Presbyterians to find examples of peaceful actions they can take to help end Israeli apartheid against the Palestinian people.

These two recommended educational resources help us see how decolonization is not the destruction of one people for the benefit of another, but a step towards justice, equity, and peace in the land where Jesus walked. The overture does not ask the General Assembly to endorse the two educational materials, but to lift them up for study.

## **1. *Why Palestine Matters: The Struggle To End Colonialism***

Published by The Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The network is one of over 40 mission networks lodged in the Presbyterian Mission Agency and it has a 2004 General Assembly mandate to advocate for Palestinian rights and to educate Presbyterians on their plight.

*Why Palestine Matters, The Struggle To End Colonialism*, contextualizes the liberation struggle of the Palestinian people within other global justice struggles. With a foreword by Richard Falk, former UN Special Rapporteur of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories, the book is grounded in international law and brings Palestine into focus through a lens of intersectionality, calling all those who struggle for justice against oppression to consider the challenge of seeing Palestinians in the context of other justice struggles. *Why Palestine Matters* demonstrates that the project of human emancipation is not limited to Palestine, but it also cannot proceed without Palestine.

*Why Palestine Matters* is a 108-page, full-color publication with visuals on every page, a discussion guide, and maps. A companion website features enhanced resources for study, including video clips and discussion tools. It is available at [whypalestinematters.org](http://whypalestinematters.org)

Praise for the book:

"...[This] wake-up call alerts us to the reality that Palestinians are real people who have real human needs and real political legitimacy, who live under an oppressive system of colonial occupying exploitation. This important book summons us to a new awareness that carries with it a mandate to policies and actions that bespeak compassion and embody restorative justice."

—Walter Brueggemann, Columbia Theological Seminary

## **2. Focus: Palestine**

Published by the WCRC, World Communion of Reformed Churches.

The 2017 General Council received a call from the Palestinian Christian community to respond to the continuing crisis in their homeland. Heeding that call, a mandate was issued to collect resources and engage in sharing those with a particular focus on how theologies are used to legitimate the continuing oppression of the Palestinian people.

This resource—*Focus: Palestine*—is the result. It is a comprehensive resource, spanning three parts, an extensive appendix, and linked videos.

*All of it may be freely downloaded, reproduced, and distributed for non-profit use with proper attribution.*

The book is organized in modular sections that can stand alone, The sections are:

Part 1: Voices and Lenses

Part 2: Theologies, Ideologies, and Resistance

Part 3: Systems of Sin and the Jerusalem Microcosm

This resource includes 13 short video episodes that are designed to accompany different parts of the book. The episodes are:

1. The Occupation Will Survive The Pandemic
2. Meet The Palestinian Christians
3. The Other Side Of The Wall
4. Evils Of Colonialism
5. What Is Your Name?
6. Is Israel A Settler Colonial State?
7. Beyond The Two-state Solution
8. Decolonization Is The Way Out
9. Why BDS? [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions]
10. BDS In A Global Context
11. Culture As Resistance: Sumud
12. Jerusalem Dance Challenge And Palestine
13. Solidarity From Around The World

This educational resource is available at:

<http://wcrch.ch/justice/palestine>

### ***5. Removal of Investments in and Subsidies for Fossil Fuels:***

**The Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:**

1. Declare that continued support of the exploration, development, funding, and exploitation of fossil fuels through investment of PC(USA) funds, violates the equitable welfare of all life and our biblical charge as humanity to care for creation, and is irretrievably incompatible with the mission and goals of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
2. Declare that all publicly traded companies whose primary source of income is derived from the exploration, development and production of fossil fuels are to be placed on the General Assembly's list of prohibited securities.
3. Strongly encourage all congregations, presbyteries, synods, the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Foundation, as well as Church-related educational institutions and individual church members, to align their investment decisions with this declaration with all due speed and diligence.
4. Call on all PC(USA) members and institutional investors to seek out investments in clean renewable energy companies.
5. Request reports from the Board of Pensions and the Presbyterian Foundation and other investing entities at the next General Assembly on the steps taken to align their investment decisions with the intent of this overture.
6. Call on the U.S. government to end all subsidies for the development and production of fossil fuels.

### **Rationale**

**Our Values:** Past General Assemblies have repeatedly stated the vocation of earth care as an essential mark of Christian discipleship and the Church's mission and ministry. Our responsibilities as a faith institution are clear: God created the earth, and it is sacred. The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. We are a part of and not independent of the created order and are meant to be caretakers and protectors of creation and our neighbors.

**Our Reality:** We are in the midst of a climate crisis that is primarily caused by the production and burning of fossil fuels which release greenhouse gases, such as methane and carbon dioxide that are warming the planet. The scientific consensus, established over many years and with increasing levels of certitude, is that the warming of our atmosphere beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial temperatures will undermine the entire web of life on the planet with catastrophic consequences.

**The Solution:** In order to avoid this, the Intergovernmental (scientific) Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported in March 2023, that the nations of the world must cut our carbon emissions by 48% from 2019 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, but last year, as in previous years, these emissions continued to climb. And while the U.S. has recently taken action to bring down its own emissions, we now produce and export more fossil fuels than ever in history. The U.S. also subsidizes the fossil fuel industry with estimates ranging from \$10-50 billion per year, while our northern neighbor, Canada and several other fossil fuel producing countries have announced that they are ending their subsidies.<sup>1</sup>



The world has to change the path it is on, but it requires two huge changes. The most critical change is a “fast, full and fair” phase out of fossil fuel production and usage. The second is the rapid expansion of sources of renewable energy. The church’s investments have power and influence which can contribute to these changes and bear witness to the world that we acknowledge the climate crisis, the suffering it is causing and its link to the burning of fossil fuels.

**The Denomination is Responding to the Climate Crisis:** The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has long recognized its obligation to take actions as faithful stewards of God’s Creation to respond to climate change. The General Assembly actions in 1981, 1998, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2022 acknowledge the realities of global warming and its effect on the “least of these” throughout our world.

The Mission Agency has raised the importance of earth care to a matter of high priority for every part of its programing and the work of our Presbyterian Hunger Program and Earth Care Congregations program are exemplary in their efforts to inform and lead the church in the fulfillment of its mission. In addition, our Office of Public Witness became a sponsor of an initiative, to be called the Fossil Fuel Non-proliferation Treaty, launched by the governments of several South Pacific island nations (among the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters). This initiative is calling for the phase-out of both new and existing sources of fossil fuels.

**The Denomination’s Response is Inconsistent:** Such educational and advocacy efforts on behalf of our denominational commitment to earth care are undermined by institutional strategies which continue to seek profit from investment in the fossil fuel industry. This practice is hypocritical at a minimum and potentially endangers our evangelistic message and leadership within the ecumenical community of church bodies. While the percentage of total investments is small, (3.4% for The Foundation [1] as of December 2023), the dollar value is in tens of millions of dollars. MRTI has begun a company by company divestment review, but the climate crisis is getting worse faster than our actions can bring about significant change.

Further, these PCUSA directed entities not only have a fiduciary duty to conserve and protect the church’s assets and return an increase through the investment process, but are also obligated to duties of loyalty and obedience to our mission and established values to the extent allowed by secular law related to such.

**Existing Policy Provides Option for Removal of Funds from an Entire Class of Firms:** The original founding document from 1984 upon which our Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) is based, “Divestment Strategy: Principles and Criteria”, clearly states that divestment of holdings can be in a particular “firm or class of firms” and that this is both part of the normal management of funds and potentially an occasion for Christian witness to God’s call for justice and renewal of society. (Paragraph 25.202) It also states that divestment is a conscious decision to dispose of any current financial stake in an enterprise or ‘class of enterprise’ because of policy or practice in regard to a social issue and to prohibit future stake so long as the offending situation holds. (Paragraph 25.261) [emphasis and quotation marks added]”

Existing Policy also Provides for Proscription of a Class of Firms: Furthermore, that document identifies that there are some classes of investments which should not be considered because of their nature which is fundamentally and irretrievably incompatible with the nature and purpose of the church. Thus, there is a list of such classes of economic activity which

are excluded or “proscribed”. This list excludes from our investment portfolio, investment in companies whose primary activity is in production of tobacco products, nuclear weapons, for-profit prisons and a few others.

**The Presbyterian Foundation is Moving in the Right Direction:** The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a long history of aligning our corporate investment decisions with our values and enabling our members to do so. In fact, according to our Presbyterian Church Foundation’s New Covenant Trust Company’s website description for their “Fossil Free Strategy” they have established an instrument specifically “[f]or investors concerned with fossil fuel emissions and climate impact” which “can be configured to exclude the entire energy sector and other firms with a high carbon footprint.”

**The Path Forward for the Whole Denomination is Not Easy:** We understand that the modern world and each of our lives are deeply intertwined with the fossil fuel industry and cannot be easily divorced from it. We live on the continuum between purity of moral conviction and the pragmatic exigencies of the current patterns and practices of the modern world. Yet we must act and act quickly, acknowledging the destructive nature of our fossil fuel investments.

In doing so, we refer the reader to the actions of our last General Assembly in support of communities where the loss of fossil fuel industry jobs will present hardship.

**We Must Change:** We understand and appreciate the role of our MRTI in encouraging enterprises to alter their practices to align more nearly with our values. However, we also know that there are some enterprises which are fundamentally such that no amount of change in practice will ever bring them into alignment. We feel it is past time for us to name the fossil fuel industry as one of these and existing policy provides for this.

For the sake of the integrity of our denomination’s Christian witness, our purpose within the created order, the maintenance of the web of life upon which all humanity depends and our children’s children, we must act quickly to withdraw all our resources, regardless of their size, either in dollar amount or percentage of those used, from the production of fossil fuels and to identify fossil fuels as a proscribed class of investments.

[1] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-12-09/us-opts-out-of-dutch-plan-to-end-fossil-fuel-subsidies-at-cop28?leadSource=uverify%20wall>