

The United Church of Canada Advances Sanctions Against Israel Through Prayer

By Christine Williams

In Christianity, the symbol of the Dove represents the “Holy Spirit” and serves as a symbol of peace. The United Church of Canada (UCC) took that symbol to new meaning through a prayer service as part of their campaign launch: “Pray, Choose, Speak for Peace in Palestine and Israel.” This movement calls for the end to “Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and went so far as to call for “prayer, worship and study” to advance the boycotts, divestments and sanctions initiative against Israel. [The companies targeted](#) are: Keter Plastics and SodaStream, which have factories in Judea and Samaria. In addition, the UCC intends to pressure Canadian retail chains to stop carrying Israeli products. They include: Canadian Tire, The Bay, Home Depot and Walmart.

"This call to prayer for anti-Israel boycotts is nothing less than an assault on the Jewish people by the United Church" said Avi Benlolo, CEO of the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies (FSWC) in Toronto. The FSWC was horrified to learn this according to a [statement](#) it issued.

The UCC initiative is a follow up to its 26 page [report](#) of its Working Group on Israel/Palestine Policy, which the [church introduced](#) at the denomination's 41st General Council which convened in Ottawa on August 11-18 last year. The General Council ruled to adopt a resolution to boycott Israeli settlement products.

It is with deep regret that the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem even needs to report on such a sad commencement of punishment levied against the Jewish people and the state of Israel particularly by a church. Israel seeks to live in peace in a vast territory that is hostile to its existence, and where it is routinely and unjustifiably referred to a [“Zionist regime”](#) .

Ever since the 1948 attack on Israel by Arab States as it declared statehood, and then again in 1967, Israel has surrendered back virtually all lands captured in its [defensive wars](#), a move unheard of even in the West, since our own capture of lands from the Native peoples. Yet the so-called “occupation” of a very small margin in the Gaza strip and of the Golan Heights is a strategic “occupation” by Israel to protect it from obliteration as called for in the PA, Hamas and Fatah Charters.

One need only read ongoing news headlines about [rocket fire](#) attacks into Israel from the Gaza strip. Since Israel’s near total withdrawal in 2005, 8-thousand rockets have been fired into its country. Since 2001, an average of three attacks per day have landed in Israel totaling over [12,800 rockets](#) and mortars. Where is the United Church of Canada to condemn the oftentimes unbearable life of some 3.5 million Israelis living under the stress of Hamas rocket fire?

Poverty is often cited by those hostile to Israel and though it cannot be ignored, the reason for it needs closer scrutiny as well as the truth about economic statistics in the West Bank and Gaza. The GDP of both of those areas far outperforms that of the US and Canada which stands between 1.5-3.5%. According to the International Monetary Fund, Palestinian Statistics and the UN, the West Bank and Gaza over the last 5 years fluctuated from between 9% and 20%. In fact there are 600 millionaires living in the Gaza strip. Former Palestinian Authority Security Commander, [Mohammed Dahlan](#), has stated that Hamas is the entity laying siege to the Gaza Strip and punishing its own people. It is not Israel.

As for the Golan Heights, Israel's presence there provides a defensible border against land invasion by Syria of which the entire Northern Israel border is within direct range of military/artillery fire. In addition the Golan Heights control the main water sources for the State of Israel.

Israel is a country that supports unequivocally the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, long abandoned by neighboring Arab States; and offers a haven to Christians persecuted in these states, including [Arab Christians](#). In fact, the 57 state Organization of Islamic Cooperation has adopted the [Cairo Declaration of Human Rights](#) based on Shariah law. In the meantime, Islamic territories like Mauritania still engage in slavery; 400-thousand black Christians in Sudan were slaughtered in a genocide because of their race and creed; women undergo acid attacks for trying to acquire an education, women are being stoned for being raped and young girls are being forced into marriage, many times with men old enough to be their grandfathers. [Murray Gordon](#), author of *Slavery in the Arab World* notes that the black slave trade pre-dated the European African slave trade by a thousand years and continued for over a century after the Europeans had abolished its practice. Christian persecution is also rampant and morbid in Islamic States and in North Korea, among others; yet the United Church of Canada is ignoring these atrocities and singling out Israel for boycotts and divestments.

I have personally spoken to many leaders in the United Church of Canada who have expressed wonderment as to why human rights violators globally are not called to accountability by their Church and why Israel is being unjustifiably singled out, bullied, targeted, attacked, insulted, offended and wounded.

Not all congregants and pastors of organized churches and groups who target Israel are pleased with this injustice in their denomination in name of justice and peace. The nation of Israel and the Jewish people can rest assured that among these groups, there are friends; and among many organized groups, there are those who truly advance the cause of justice and peace.

We at the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem are supporters of human rights, as Christians we pursue peace and love with humanity and we are loyal friends to Israel and its people.

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