

Testimony in Opposition to Ohio HB 476
Ohio Senate Committee on Government Accountability & Oversight
December 7, 2016

Chairman Coley, Vice Chairman Seitz, Ranking Member Yuko and Honored members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony.

I am Pamela Beck of Shaker Heights. I am representing UCC-PIN, the United Church of Christ Palestine/Israel Network. The United Church of Christ and its predecessors have been active in the Middle East since 1819. Currently, the United Church of Christ has partnerships with churches and civic groups in Israel, Palestine and throughout the Middle East.

Do you know the facts? Most Americans — including, I believe, most Jewish Americans — do not. The abuses the Palestinians endure continually are not reported in our United States mainstream media.

In 1948 over 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee from their homes; some tricked by the military that they needed to leave just for two weeks “for their safety”; they were never allowed to return. More than 400 of their villages were destroyed. The new state of Israel took 78 percent of historic Palestine; Palestinians were left with the remaining 22 percent in the West Bank and the Gaza strip. In the 1967 war, the Israeli military occupied the West Bank and Gaza; the occupation continues to this day in defiance of international law and multiple United Nations’ resolutions.

Let’s talk about now. You heard about the wild fires over the dry land and that the government blamed the Palestinians. You probably did not hear that firefighting authorities and the police say that no authority has determined that any of the fires were deliberately ignited as a hostile act.

Each week there are military night raids on Palestinian homes, with systematic ill-treatment of Palestinian children taken into detention without charges, with parents not knowing for days where their children are, some of whom are subject to torture.

There are land confiscations, home demolitions, destroyed olive trees and agricultural plots, home water tanks destroyed or holes shot from soldier guns so the water leaks out. Restricted movement, numerous checkpoints, and the wall.

International boycotting and divestment are essential to expose the facts. They are effective, non-violent methods, bringing attention and action to install a Just Peace rather than human rights abuses and violence. They are actions of our First Amendment Rights

of free speech. HB 476 is unconstitutional. If the State of Ohio blocks peaceful protest and free speech rights via HB 476, then the State of Ohio denies the rights of its own citizens and becomes complicit in the Israeli policies and acts of human rights abuses against Palestinians.

The UCC has a long history of supporting boycotts and divestment against products produced under unfair conditions (e.g., lettuce, grapes, etc.) and policies that produce unfair and unjust conditions, including apartheid in South Africa.

At the UCC Synod in 2015, the delegates adopted the resolution to “Take Actions toward a Just Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”. The resolution supports our Palestinian partners’ calls for non-violent actions to help establish justice and peace. The resolution calls for the UCC to

- Divest from companies that profit from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and people
- Boycott products made by companies that operate in illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories
- Advocate with Congress to ensure Israel’s compliance with US laws, related to
 - Use of the \$3.1+ billion of military aid that the U.S. gives annually to Israel — more than to any other nation — and
 - Israeli human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories
- Continue interfaith dialogue, including with Jewish colleagues and organizations.

The resolution addresses the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and its people; it does not challenge Israel’s existence. It is a statement for human rights and a Just Peace.

What is a Just Peace? More than peace without violence, it is justice, equality, recognition of our common humanity, meeting the needs of others, empathy, fostering just economic development, taking responsibility for conflict and injustice, and correcting the inequities that cause violence. The proponents of HB 476 ignore or hide the decades of human rights violations and intimidation, currently intensified, by the Israeli government and illegal settlers.

Palestinians are struggling for their rights and freedom.

I call on you to support a Just Peace attained without violence.

I call on you to stop HB 476 now.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela H. Beck