

Testimony for Hearing on Ohio HCR 10
June 27, 2018
Connie Hammond
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To: Senator LaRose

Chairman LaRose, Vice Chair Kunze, Ranking Member Schiavoni and members of the Committee:

I am a member of the United Methodist Church, United Methodists for Kairos Response and the Free Speech Coalition of Ohio.

Since my testimony at the last hearing on March 21 in opposition to HCR 10, the West Ohio conference of the United Methodist Church passed a resolution concerning denominational investments that included a clause that stated: "Be it further resolved that the West Ohio Conference supports the right of churches to use human rights as criteria for investing and opposes governmental efforts to suppress such rights. This resolution passed overwhelmingly on June 5 at the West Ohio Annual Conference.

In addition, last week, the Presbyterian Church (USA) convened for its biannual general assembly in St. Louis, Missouri. The Presbyterian church, through the leadership of the Israel/Palestine Mission Network (IPMN), has taken bold stances to affirm Palestinian human rights. This year's general assembly fully adopted overtures on Opposing congressional and state anti-BDS legislation.

November 6, 2017, twenty Christian leaders representing 17 national organization sent an open letter to congress opposing anti-BDS legislation:

"We are concerned by any legislation that suppresses legitimate criticism of public policy, and that restricts freedom of expression and our ability to determine our own witness through investment and selective purchasing practices. While we may not be of one mind about which measures are most effective, we collectively affirm and defend the right of churches and organizations to use economic measures in the specific case of Israel-Palestine. This is consistent with how churches and church-related organizations have employed economic measures as nonviolent tactics in many instances of seeking justice and peace throughout history.

As churches and church-related organizations, we all share a hope and desire for an end to occupation, an end to violence and terrorism, and for equal rights for all people. If our respective denominations and organizations, through debate and reflection, adopt policies that employ economic leverage to advance these policy objectives, as we do with many other policy objectives, we believe it is our right to do so. It is an assertion of our right as stewards of our financial resources to spend and invest according to our theological and moral conviction, expressed in our respective denominational or organizational policies.

In this case, our assertion of this right is an effort to change unjust Israeli policy toward Palestinians, not to delegitimize the State of Israel, nor to marginalize or isolate our Jewish neighbors, or their enterprises. Our choices to purchase and invest responsibly, and to advocate with corporations or governments, are motivated by our firm commitments to justice and peace for all people, without discrimination or exclusion."

You can read the entire letter and see the signatories here:

https://www.kairosresponse.org/20_christian_leaders_letter_congress_nov2017.html

Also, on November 7, 2017, United Methodists and a broad faith coalition published a full-page newspaper advertisement calling on all Americans to oppose those state and federal anti-BDS legislation that penalize our right to freedom of speech in the form of boycotts. We believe that the advertisement helped towards the eventual blocking of an anti-BDS bill in Kansas bill by a Kansas Federal judge.

https://www.kairosresponse.org/fullpagead_kcstar_nov2017.html?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=baccedb5-7da4-42a0-b79c-56d22dd1c83f

I am hopeful that amendments to this resolution will remove **ALL** the language condemning the BDS the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, respecting the dignity, human rights, and the right to self-determination of all people in the region.

If the anti-BDS language is not removed, it should be clear that the intention of sponsors of this resolution is to limit free speech and not to combat antisemitism on college campuses in Ohio.

The International BDS movement is not anti-Semitic. The call to BDS issued by 170 Palestinian civil society organizations asked the international community to stand for freedom, equality and justice. The goals of the movement are to end the 50-year old, illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory, establish equality under the law between Palestinians and Israelis living in Israel, and to address the rights of Palestinian refugees – all in accordance with International law and internationally accepted standards of human rights. It does not target or blame individuals but seeks to realize its goals through campaigns to hold companies and institutions complicit in violations of law or human rights abuses accountable for their actions.

The right to boycott and to promote boycott is constitutionally protected speech.

Please to not pass this resolution.