

GCE 10 AUTHORIZING ACTION FOR A PRINCIPLE-BASED APPROACH TO JUSTICE WORK IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA WITH REGARDS TO PALESTINE - ISRAEL

Origin: Sub-Executive of the General Council

1. What is the issue?

The 2023 annual meeting of the 44th General Council approved in principle the use of a principle-based approach to the justice work of the United Church. The principles were intended to guide all the justice advocacy work of the church, but also have particular resonance for the church's response to the occupation of Palestine, now an ongoing and escalating war in Gaza and the Middle East. In adopting the principles, the council asked the General Secretary (staff) to begin using them and to gather learning for the ultimate sharpening of the principles to be brought to the 45th General Council in 2025. At the same time, a number of regional proposals, calling on the church to engage in Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), to join the consensus of the international human rights community in recognizing and rejecting Israel's apartheid system of laws and legal procedures towards the Palestinian people, and to engage with the Kairos Palestine Call, were postponed definitely. As the church seeks to move from a policy-based engagement for its justice work to a principle-based framework, it has not been clear how far staff can go in applying the principles with respect to the strategy of engaging with BDS and joining with the international community's call to action.

2. Why is it important?

The initial call on the church to examine its policy with regards to Palestine-Israel, related to the fact that the events in the region were moving at a faster rate than our policies were able to respond to. It also challenged the church's commitment to privilege the voices of its partners and to live into the reality of *Mending the World*, to join people of good will in addressing the issues of injustice in the world. The principle-based approach offered significantly more flexibility and nimbleness to our responses. However, with the use of the principles, it has become clear that the action of the 44th General Council in 2022 and 2023 needs further clarity. The General Secretary (staff) have been unclear as to whether the principles allow us to move beyond existing policies, or whether advocacy could include amplifying and engaging with the full spectrum of tactics of the BDS movements (even though the call for ending arms sale to Israel is part of the BDS movement) or signing/joining with international human rights communities that have clearly named the practices and laws of the state of Israel as apartheid.

The 2024 annual meeting of the 44th General Council on October 19, 2024, will be dealing with a number of proposals: GCE04, CS01, SW09, FSL01, PM02, RC1501, SW02 *Peace in Palestine and Israel* which were postponed definitely¹ at the 2022 meeting of the 44th General Council, as well as NEW04 *Join the Apartheid Free Communities Movement Proposal*. This last proposal was

¹ an action that a council can take when it is not ready to make a decision on a matter but intends to return to it at a specific time, in this case, following the development of principles GS103

received by the Executive of General Council May 10-11, 2024 who decided: to direct the General Secretary to take action based on what is actionable on a principle-based approach (*TICIF02 Principles-Based Justice Work*, approved October 2023), and to table the sign-on to the movement until the October, 2024 General Council annual meeting. The annual meeting will also be receiving an interim report on the use of the principles to date. This meeting will provide an opportunity to offer clarity as to the particular issues relating to the advocacy work on Israel and Palestine.

3. What might the General Council do?

The General Council might:

- a. **affirm that the application of the principles allows for the adoption of the strategies of Boycott, Divestment and Sanction(BDS) Movement and the ability to respond positively to the request of NEW04 - *Join the Apartheid Free Communities Movement*, joining the consensus of the international human rights community in recognizing and rejecting Israel's apartheid system of laws and legal procedures towards the Palestinian people and refer proposals GCE04, CS01, SW09, FSL01, PM02, RC1501, SW02 *Peace in Palestine and Israel* to the General Secretary as part of the process to guide the church's response.**
- b. **direct the General Secretary to continue to report to the Executive of General Council on the advocacy work related to Palestine and Israel and how the principles were applied, and to provide any learnings to the Theology Inter-Church Interfaith Committee**

4. What will be the impact?

Partners in the region will appreciate the clear solidarity of the church. Because some of the issues are contested, some of the people of the United Church and some communities of faith will be impacted. The application of these principles will enhance consistency and integrity of the prophetic ministry of our denomination while helping General Council Office staff with adaptability to changing dynamics within the broader middle east context. Furthermore, in response to partners' voices, the principle-based approach will promote the most desired systemic change, collaboration and partnership.

5. How does this proposal help us live into the commitments on equity?

The United Church of Canada is committed to the principle from the 1997 Mending the World policy – to work with people of goodwill to address the issues of injustice in the world. This

proposal also aligns with the 2008 affirmation of Global and Canadian partnership principles. The action of this proposal will enable the church to continue to live deeply into these commitments. It will strengthen our call for respect for human dignity, compassion and empathy as well as equality and fairness in approaching justice work.