

# A briefing document for the Methodist people on the arguments for and against the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions Movement

## Foreword

This briefing responds to the request of the Conference of the Methodist Church in Britain in 2013 for a report on “the arguments for and against the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) Movement”.<sup>1</sup> It follows debates and resolutions at the Methodist Conference over 13 years and the presentation of the report *Justice for Palestine and Israel* to the 2010 Methodist Conference. The 2010 conference endorsed a limited boycott of goods and services from Israeli settlements in the West Bank while also urging Methodists to study and visit the Holy Land and to be active in prayer for a resolution to the current conflict. The 2010 Methodist Conference acknowledged the Kairos Palestine Call launched in 2009 by a group of Palestinian Christian leaders.<sup>2</sup> To date the Methodist Conference has not provided a formal response to the analysis represented in the document *A Moment of Truth*.<sup>3</sup>

In the course of preparing this briefing, the Methodist Church in Britain launched an online consultation which generated 2,500 responses from individuals and organisations. Every response has been read and considered and cumulatively they represent a rich source of information. The Methodist Council expresses gratitude to all who engaged with this process. Further consultation took place through face to face meetings with key individuals in the UK and in Israel/Palestine. In addition the President of the Conference of the Methodist Church participated in a delegation to the region comprising both Methodists and Jews.

The Methodist Council expresses its sincere thanks to the Joint Public Issues Team and those who served on the Reference Group to help shape this briefing. It is offered to the Methodist people for consideration and prayerful reflection. At this particularly difficult time for the region our challenge must be to overcome despondency with concerted prayer, listening, reflection and appropriate response.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Aim of the briefing

This briefing does not seek to offer a judgement on the call of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement. Rather it explores a range of arguments for and against, offering evidence in each case, but ultimately respecting the authenticity of a range of perspectives on this question.

The BDS Movement<sup>4</sup> was launched in 2005 by Palestinian civil society groups. The BDS call has been promoted against a backdrop of increasing settlement construction. Settler outposts across the West Bank, house demolitions in East Jerusalem and Israeli development of Palestinian-owned land in the Jordan Valley<sup>5</sup> are perceived by many Palestinians to undermine hopes for a viable contiguous Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Although the two-state solution still has support among both Israelis and Palestinians it is clear that, in both communities,

1 Notice of Motion 201, 2013 Conference of the Methodist Church in Britain.

2 This call is expressed in the document *A Moment of Truth* that articulates a theological analysis of the Palestinian situation. See [www.kairospalestine.ps](http://www.kairospalestine.ps) and [www.kairosbritain.org.uk](http://www.kairosbritain.org.uk)

3 While the Methodist Conference has not studied in detail or debated this call, it has commended *A Moment of Truth* to Methodist people as one source to aid reflection on the issues surrounding the conflict in Israel/Palestine.

4 [www.bdsmovement.net](http://www.bdsmovement.net)

5 facilitated by the Settlement Division of the World Zionist Organisation: - B'Tselem “*Land Grab Israeli Settlement Policy in the West Bank*” (May 2002) pg 14 and pg 21 Haaretz “Document confirms World Zionist Organization allocates land to settlers in Jordan valley” [www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.545856](http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.545856)

public confidence in its viability is diminishing.<sup>6 7</sup>

Nevertheless, the sensitivity around the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions is genuine and intense. The term ‘boycott’ was used in Germany in the 1930s to project hatred toward the Jews and provided a means through which hatred could find physical expression. This culminated in the ‘Shoah’ or holocaust and therefore the notion of ‘boycott’ resonates powerfully for the Jewish community today. Methodist Conference statements on anti-Semitism dating back to at least 1943<sup>8</sup> record the distress of Methodists over anti-Semitic actions against the homes and places of worship of Jewish people in Britain and elsewhere, notably Western Europe and the Soviet Union. But in recent years the Methodist Church in Britain has found engagement on issues around the conflict in Israel and Palestine challenging for our relationships with many of our Jewish brothers and sisters in the UK.

This briefing provides background on the BDS Movement (section 2) before discussing the specifics of boycott, divestment and sanctions. In sections 3 to 8, each sub-section presents arguments for and against BDS although not every argument falls neatly into one of those two categories. Finally in the concluding section some key themes are highlighted. While much more could be said, we hope that this short report might provide a helpful introduction for Methodist people on the arguments for and against the BDS Movement.

## 2. Background – the BDS Movement

### 2.1 Organisation, support and aims

The BDS Movement comprises 170 Palestinian organisations and is coordinated by the BDS National Committee (BNC).<sup>9</sup> The BNC is made up of 27 organisations and includes all of the major Palestinian Trades Unions. While the BDS Movement has some political backing among Palestinians, the call to boycott Israel is not supported by the Palestinian Authority, which in 2010 endorsed only a limited boycott of Israeli settlements.

The BDS Movement was established a year after the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the separation wall and associated settlement regime.<sup>10</sup> The Movement seeks a boycott of Israel “until it meets its obligations under international law”.<sup>11</sup>

The BDS Movement highlights the situation of three sections of the Palestinian community: those living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, those living in Israel and Palestinians who are refugees. The stated aims of the Movement are:

1. ending its occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967 and dismantling the Wall
2. recognising the fundamental rights of the Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality and
3. respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in the UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

The Movement seeks to achieve these aims by building a global, Palestinian-led non violent movement.

### 2.2 Recognising competing narratives

The BDS Movement’s core aims are bound up with the desire of Palestinians for self-determination. An appreciation of the political aspirations of both Jews and Palestinians is helped by an understanding of the historical context.<sup>12</sup> We might note, for example, the rise of Arab Nationalism during the decline of Ottoman Empire, Arab resistance to

6 Fafo Institute Key Results from an opinion poll, Gaza and West Bank, 2009. Palestinian Centre for Policy Research Sept. 2012 “ Findings show that a majority of 57% (compared to 55% last June) believe that the two-state solution is no longer practical due to expanded settlement construction while only 37% believe the two state solution remains viable because settlements can be dismantled or evacuated once an agreement is reached” [www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2012/p45english.pdf](http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2012/p45english.pdf) Palestinian Centre for Policy Research, Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll, June 2013, “58% of Palestinians think that the two-state solution is no longer viable. 51% of Israelis think that the two-state solution is bound to fail because of settlements.” [www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2012/p45english.pdf](http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2012/p45english.pdf)

7 [www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Carter-Israel-not-committed-to-two-state-solution](http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Carter-Israel-not-committed-to-two-state-solution)

8 In 1943 Conference agreed “that anti-Semitism is utterly incompatible with the Christian doctrine of man [sic] and is a denial of the Christian Gospel. Malicious gossip and irresponsible charges against Jews, no less than active persecution, are incompatible with Christian standards of behaviour”. For references to other statements see the 2011 Methodist Conference reply to Memorial 32 on Anti-Semitism. [www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2011-pc-76-memorials-0812.doc](http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2011-pc-76-memorials-0812.doc)

9 [www.bdsmovement.net/bnc](http://www.bdsmovement.net/bnc)

10 *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, International Court of Justice*, [www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?pr=71&code=mwp&p1=3&p2=4&p3=6](http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?pr=71&code=mwp&p1=3&p2=4&p3=6)

11 [www.bdsmovement.net/call](http://www.bdsmovement.net/call)

12 *Justice for Palestine and Israel, A report to Methodist Conference in 2010*, [www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf10a-14-pal-israel-160211.pdf](http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf10a-14-pal-israel-160211.pdf) See also *Land of Promise? An Anglican exploration of Christian attitudes to the Holy Land*, (The Anglican Consultative Council, London, 2012), [Kairos Britain Time for Action](http://www.kairosbritain.org.uk), [www.kairosbritain.org.uk](http://www.kairosbritain.org.uk) and “Zionism: A Jewish Communal Response from the UK”, [www.bod.org.uk/content/ZionismAJewishCommunalResponse.pdf](http://www.bod.org.uk/content/ZionismAJewishCommunalResponse.pdf)

British and French imperialism and the impact of this history on the shape of relations between the West and the Middle East today. Meanwhile expressions of political Zionism were strengthened by the tragic Jewish experience of forced population transfer and genocide within and beyond the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and early 20th century.<sup>13</sup> The ‘Shoah’ and continued subjugation and persecution of Jews in Arab nations after 1945, leading to expulsion, underline the importance of a national home for the Jewish people.

These contrasting narratives provide one insight into the intractability of the conflict. The search for peace, it has been suggested, will entail a “coming together to examine the past conflict and the wrongs inflicted on individuals and populations, to find a way forward that brings two distinct and opposing narratives if not to harmony, then at least to mutual understanding and tolerance”.<sup>14</sup> It is argued therefore that the tactic of BDS, by giving credence to one perspective only, is unlikely to promote an atmosphere for dialogue that could be truly transformative in nature.

### 2.3 Dialogue and exchange – a view from the BDS Movement

Conversely, from the perspective of the BDS Movement, proposals for mutual dialogue are flawed when there is no mutuality. For a Palestinian in the West Bank every aspect of everyday life is over-shadowed by the experience of military occupation<sup>15</sup> and, in the case of Gaza, by the experience of blockade. In contrast, since the end of the second intifada, the cost of occupation to many Israelis living in a settlement or in Israel is much less tangible. This inequality may skew the dynamic and quality of dialogue.

There is little expectation within the Palestinian community that a continued stress on dialogue to the exclusion of more coercive actions could reverse the trend of the past 20 years.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the BDS Movement is deeply suspicious of any project that seeks to promote ‘normal’ relations between Palestinians and Israelis “without placing as its goal resistance to and exposure of the Israeli occupation and all forms of discrimination and oppression against the Palestinian people”.<sup>17</sup>

The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) is a part of the BDS Movement and leads in setting policy for cultural and academic boycotts. Dialogue that addresses the occupation is encouraged but, in PACBI’s view, cultural exchange that implicitly accepts occupation as a “status quo that can be lived with” and which could present the occupying power as “enlightened”, should be resisted.<sup>18</sup> According to PACBI, most Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza would agree that normal relations with Israel can be achieved only once there is an end to the military occupation of Palestinian lands.

In this section we have recognised some clear fault-lines. It might be instructive to note at this point that on the question of BDS there is no unanimity within either the Palestinian or the Jewish Israeli communities.<sup>19</sup> Having set a context for this briefing, Sections 3 to 8 will concentrate on arguments for and against various aspects of the BDS call.

## 3. Arguments for and against the concept of boycott, divestment and sanctions

Firstly, we examine arguments for and against the BDS Movement as a whole before moving on to look at consumer, academic and cultural boycotts separately. The following arguments relate to the intentions and motivations behind the movement or to the likely impact of BDS as a strategy for bringing about change.

### 3.1 BDS and the treatment of Israel

Some of the discussion in section 3 will critique often repeated assertions that are either for or against BDS. For example, some have argued that BDS treats Israel differently from other countries and that this is an indication of anti-Semitic motivations. Addressing this criticism in the context of Methodism in Britain, we might note that the Methodist Conference and groups associated with the Methodist Church regularly highlight situations of human rights abuse in many parts of the world and call for action. Support for boycott is only usually considered in response

13 It should be noted that persecution of Jews (as is also the case for Muslims) predates the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

14 *Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions of Israel*; The Board of Deputies of British Jews’ Response to the Methodist Church in Britain’s Inquiry into the Tactic of BDS; [www.bod.org.uk/content/Board%20ResponseMethodistBDS.pdf](http://www.bod.org.uk/content/Board%20ResponseMethodistBDS.pdf)

15 Methodists continue to express concern over military occupation manifest by the routine use of administrative detention, the discriminatory planning regime in much of the West Bank and associated house demolitions, the restrictions on movement within the West Bank and an unequal sharing of water resources.

16 However, it does not follow that those in the Palestinian community who have such limited expectations would necessarily support BDS as a consequence.

17 *Israel’s Exceptionalism; Normalising the Abnormal*; PACBI; <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1749>

18 [972mag.com/what-is-normalization/31368](http://972mag.com/what-is-normalization/31368)

19 Although among Jewish people in Israel and elsewhere there is a very dominant strand of opinion that is opposed to BDS.

to a significant call by those suffering abuse. South Africa, Namibia and Myanmar/Burma are all cases where the Methodist Conference has urged a boycott by its members.

Israel has had more Security Council resolutions passed against it than any other country<sup>20</sup> and yet continues to be supported and embraced by Western governments; for example, Israel is the top recipient of US aid.<sup>21</sup> The BNC states that this represents “an unprecedented impunity for violating the rights of the Palestinian people and of Arab peoples in neighbouring countries.”<sup>22</sup> This has led supporters of a boycott to the conclusion that this course is proportionate and necessary.

There are strong arguments to support the case that BDS is not in itself anti-Semitic. There are Jews and Jewish organisations that support some form of BDS as well as those that oppose BDS. In their responses to the consultation of the Methodist Church, those who support some form of BDS say that their motivation for doing so stems from their commitment to justice. In this, they align themselves with Christian supporters of a boycott and those of others faiths or of none.

### 3.2 BDS fails to fully appreciate Jewish national aspirations

Just as Palestinians have a legitimate right to self-determination so Jewish people also have legitimate national aspirations. The Board of Deputies of British Jews states that “the philosophical foundations of the State of Israel do not lie in religious aspirations alone, but are also based upon the political concept of self-determination and the right for the Jewish people to control their own destiny after a history that has been characterised by persecution in the Diaspora culminating in the murder of Jews on an industrial scale in the Holocaust just for being Jewish.”<sup>23</sup>

The Law of Return, granting any Jewish person anywhere the right to settle in Israel, was passed by the Knesset on 5 July, 1950. Since then 2.7 million Jews have migrated to Israel. For the BDS Movement the application of the principle of equality requires that all laws privileging Jews including the Law of Return would have to be applied in a non-discriminatory manner or abolished.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.3 Does the BDS Movement promote a one-state solution?

The three aims taken together have led some to believe that the motivation of the boycott movement is the desire to see some form of one-state solution in which Palestinians have a majority. It is suggested that at the core of the BDS Movement is the “desire to strike at the very legitimacy of the state of Israel, ultimately arguing for the dismantling of the world’s only Jewish state”.<sup>25</sup> However the BDS Movement intentionally does not specify whether its stated aims would be best met by one or two states. While individuals within the Movement may express their own preferences and insights on this question many within the BDS Movement would argue that the nature of the solution is a matter for political negotiation.<sup>26 27</sup>

### 3.4 Promoting non-violent action

Boycott is but one tactic within a set of non-violent actions promoted by some who are seeking to encourage non-

20 [www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/study-israel-leads-in-ignoring-security-council-resolutions-1.31971](http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/study-israel-leads-in-ignoring-security-council-resolutions-1.31971) [www.timesofisrael.com/israel-to-campaign-for-security-council-seat-embassy-says/](http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-to-campaign-for-security-council-seat-embassy-says/) [www.unwatch.org](http://www.unwatch.org)

21 S Epstein, M Lawson, A Tiersky, *State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs: FY2013 Budget and Appropriations Congressional Research Service* [www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42621.pdf](http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42621.pdf)

22 BDS National Committee (response to the Methodist Church in Britain consultation on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions).

23 The Board of Deputies of British Jews response to the Methodist Church in Britain’s Inquiry into the Tactic of BDS [www.bod.org.uk/live/content.php?Item\\_ID=130&Blog\\_ID=1052](http://www.bod.org.uk/live/content.php?Item_ID=130&Blog_ID=1052)

24 It is argued by the BDS Movement that there is a fundamental inequality in permitting Jewish people wherever they are located to migrate to Israel and take up citizenship while denying the same right to Palestinians who fled Israel in 1948 or 1967.

25 “The Board of Deputies of British Jews response to the Methodist Church in Britain’s Inquiry into the Tactic of BDS” [www.bod.org.uk/live/content.php?Item\\_ID=130&Blog\\_ID=1052](http://www.bod.org.uk/live/content.php?Item_ID=130&Blog_ID=1052)

26 For example “the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) stance on peace is based on the UN resolutions and peaceful coexistence in a two-state solution” (Palestinian Trade Unions, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2006), and also “Stop the Wall does not explicitly support one solution against the other” [www.stophthewall.org/faqs](http://www.stophthewall.org/faqs). Omar Barghouti, one of the founders of the BDS Movement, asserts that “most networks, unions and political parties in the BDS National Committee still advocate a two-state solution outside the realm of the BDS Movement” Barghouti, Omar, *BDS – the global struggle for Palestinian Rights*, (Haymarket Books, 2011)

27 It is maybe instructive to note that the position of the Methodist Conference as set out in 2002 acknowledges the high degree of support behind the two-state solution. Yet this summary position is carefully worded such that an alternative along the lines of a bi-national state would not be excluded if such a solution had the support of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In 2002 the Methodist Conference stated, “In summary the Methodist position is that a return to the borders of 1967 and a status for Jerusalem as a place for two nations and three faiths, with parity of esteem, is the real basis upon which trust could be built up among the different communities. The desire for a lasting peace can only be based on trust, security and freedom from fear for all people in the area”.

violent resistance among Palestinians.<sup>28</sup> Other non-violent actions encouraged over the past decade include building Palestinian civil society movements, building networks with other movements overseas, “steadfastness” (standing up to overwhelming odds and never giving in), peaceful demonstration and legal action in courts in other countries. Advocates of non-violence seek to build public confidence in peaceful resistance over that of armed confrontation. As, sadly, given the increasing levels of anger and frustration the prospect of a new armed conflict cannot be ruled out,<sup>29</sup> the need for effective non-violent strategies has never been greater.<sup>30</sup> Among the strategies for non-violence BDS has come to be regarded by many Palestinians and others as particularly influential.

### 3.5 Negative impacts within Israel

There are differing views as to how the tactic of BDS will eventually impact on the Israeli public. During the second intifada (2000 to 2005) Israeli citizens were targeted with bombings and drive-by shootings. Continued violence on both sides, including the firing of rockets at Israeli civilian populations by extreme Islamist groups, discourages parties from moving beyond management of the conflict through measures to enforce physical security. The vulnerabilities experienced by Israelis will need to be heard and addressed alongside the fear experienced by Palestinians. There is general agreement that many Israelis may assume that Israel is being targeted by BDS “because they hate us” or “because they are anti-Semitic”.<sup>31</sup> This may well initially “weaken the Israeli left and support hawkish elements within Israel”.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.6 Differing perspectives on entrenching division

There is little doubt that BDS is likely to entrench division. This is potentially problematic given that genuine peace will require not just an agreed set of borders but also reconciliation and mutual understanding. To some extent BDS could distract from a dialogue around the application of the core principles of justice, equality and self-determination across all jurisdictions including those under the control of the Palestinian Authority. It is often suggested that it would be better for the Church to, instead, join with other faiths in efforts to facilitate bridge-building projects and build trust.

It is also recognised that no discussion of political hopes and no commitment to political and social change can happen without non-violent conflict of some form. It would be naive to think otherwise. Overcoming barriers and building bridges is a primary aim of much conflict transformation work, but conflict is also an inescapable feature of human living and can often be unavoidable to bring necessary change.<sup>33</sup> This theme was addressed by the Statement of Conference on Political Responsibility in 1995.<sup>34</sup>

## 4. Arguments concerning consumer boycott

The following sections look at some arguments that are specific to consumer, academic and cultural boycott as well as divestment and sanctions. While the BDS Movement places particular focus on companies that it considers complicit in supporting the occupation (eg Carmel Agrexco, Ahava, Eden Springs, Motorola and SodaStream)<sup>35</sup> its recommendation to consumers is to avoid all Israeli products.

### 4.1 The economic impact on Palestinians

There is broad acknowledgement that an effective consumer boycott of Israel could cause Palestinians in the West Bank or Israel to lose jobs and a valuable source of income. However, the endorsement of the BDS Movement by the major Palestinian trade unions and farmers unions indicates that many Palestinians take the view that the pain inflicted by BDS is necessary to achieve rights in the longer term.

28 See Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research poll no. 49, Sept 2013, for polling in West Bank and Gaza on attitudes towards non-violence verses armed confrontation. Qu 58. [www.pcpsr.org](http://www.pcpsr.org)

29 [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/10436109/John-Kerry-warns-of-third-intifada-if-Israeli-Palestinian-talks-fail.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/10436109/John-Kerry-warns-of-third-intifada-if-Israeli-Palestinian-talks-fail.html)

30 The picture is further complicated in that among the supporters of BDS will be those who would also support violence as a means of resistance.

31 Boycott from Within [boycottisrael.info/content/frequently-asked-questions](http://boycottisrael.info/content/frequently-asked-questions) Question 11

32 “The Board of Deputies of British Jews response to the Methodist Church in Britain’s Inquiry into the Tactic of BDS” [www.bod.org.uk/live/content.php?Item\\_ID=130&Blog\\_ID=1052](http://www.bod.org.uk/live/content.php?Item_ID=130&Blog_ID=1052)

33 *Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation*, (The Methodist Church/The United Reformed Church, 2006) “Chapter 6: Towards a Christian Vocation of Peacemaking”

34 The Statement offers a broad reflection on the theme of conflict, both within churches and beyond, arising from political advocacy carried out by local or national Church entities. It questions whether the avoidance of conflict is always an appropriate ideal. “Methodist Church in Britain Statement of Conference on Political Responsibility” [www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/pi\\_politicalresponsibilitystatement\\_95.pdf](http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/pi_politicalresponsibilitystatement_95.pdf) Para 45 (e)

35 BDS Movement, [www.bdsmovement.net/activecamps/consumer-boycott](http://www.bdsmovement.net/activecamps/consumer-boycott)

## 4.2 Problems with the feasibility of consumer boycotts

A blanket ban on all Israeli goods is difficult to achieve as Israeli manufactured products and components are prevalent in the UK market place. For example, the Israeli-owned company Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd supplies many NHS prescription medicines.<sup>36</sup> The pragmatic approach proposed by the BDS Movement is to boycott goods within reason, but this does rather suggest a boycott of convenience.

## 5. Arguments concerning academic boycott

In 2004, 170 Palestinian organisations formed the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI).<sup>37</sup> Its call is for a boycott of institutions rather than individuals.<sup>38</sup> The call for an academic boycott is predicated on the argument that Israeli academic institutions, firstly, maintain a close relationship with the political-military-intelligence establishment and contribute to the Occupation, and secondly, fail to recognise Israeli responsibility for the colonisation of the West Bank.<sup>39</sup>

### 5.1 The potential high impact of an academic boycott

Those who support the tactic of boycott point out that an academic boycott would have a high profile due to the justifiable pride that Israel has in its academic achievements.

### 5.2 Academic boycott runs contrary to the principle of a free exchange of ideas

The free exchange of ideas lies at the heart of academia. Although the academic boycott is not intended to apply to individual Israeli scholars engaged in ordinary forms of academic exchange<sup>40</sup> it would impact on individual academics working within Israeli universities. An academic boycott would to some extent curtail the opportunities for academic exchange and would discriminate against Israeli academics who are critical of the Israeli government. Several responses to the Methodist Church consultation pointed out that, irrespective of the political pressures placed on academic institutions, the Israeli academic community contains some of the most free-thinking members of Israeli society.

## 6. Arguments concerning cultural boycott

PACBI also coordinates the cultural boycott. The boycott targets events or products that are sponsored in some way by an official Israeli body (eg government ministry, municipality, embassy, consulate, state or other public film fund, etc). Although it is not targeted towards artists on the basis of their nationality, individual Israeli artists will inevitably be affected.

### 6.1 Potential impact – recalling the South African experience

While the situations of apartheid South Africa and that of Israel and the occupied territories differ markedly, it is clear that boycotts, divestments and sanctions helped to shift the understanding and perception of the white South African population. The global cultural and sporting boycott in South Africa was a particularly effective tool in persuading the white South African public that apartheid had to be brought to an end.

### 6.2 Lacking discrimination

Whatever the guidelines for a cultural boycott it is likely that it will be perceived as an attack on Jewish culture and on a people on the basis of their nationality. A broad cultural boycott could also affect some Israeli artists who are known to play a positive role in bringing people together to overcome the conflict.

36 [www.tevauk.com/](http://www.tevauk.com/)

37 PACBI is a member of the BNC

38 PACBI Guidelines for the International Academic Boycott of Israel (Revised August 2010), [www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1108](http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=1108)

39 The PACBI call - <http://pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=869>

40 American Studies Association Council Statement on the Boycott of Israeli Academic Institutions

## 7. Arguments concerning divestment

The BDS Movement suggests that institutional investors divest from all Israeli companies and all companies that support or profit from “Israel’s violations of international law”.<sup>41</sup> In practice the BDS Movement concentrates on companies that are trading in the occupied territories or are in some way directly supporting the occupation.

The Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church (CFB)<sup>42</sup>, has an existing investment policy in relation to Israel and Palestine.<sup>43</sup> This policy identifies causes of concern with respect to commercial involvement in the occupation<sup>44</sup> and guides representations made to companies. Divestment is considered on a case by case basis if, following discussion, a company’s activities and practices remain a serious concern.

### 7.1 Impact of divestment on company behaviour is tangible and growing

In a global marketplace companies are becoming more aware of the reputational risks associated with their relationships with key partners in areas where there are human rights concerns. Divestment programmes have helped to highlight the role of international companies in the occupation.

### 7.2 Divestment closes the door to further engagement

Investors who have active engagement programmes are aware that when divesting you close the door to further engagement with a company. Investors no longer have the relationship of a concerned investor to influence a company on wider human rights issues beyond Israel and Palestine.

## 8. Arguments concerning sanctions

Sanctions in their broadest sense encompass measures to restrict military links, economic links or diplomatic links.<sup>45</sup> As with other elements of BDS, sanctions can either be applied narrowly against settlements<sup>46</sup> (reflecting the views of the overwhelming majority of governments including all EU states that consider the establishment and expansion of settlements in the West Bank to be illegal under international law) or more widely against Israel.<sup>47</sup> For example there have been calls for suspension of the EU Israel Association Agreement on the basis of Israel’s failure to live up to mutual respect for human rights and democratic principles, as stipulated by article 2 of the Agreement.<sup>48</sup>

### 8.1 Failure to respond to international concerns is bound to impact relations

The settler population in the occupied Palestinian territories has increased from 110,000 at the time of the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993 to over 300,000 today. Israel’s unilateral action in expanding settlements has made a lasting peace based on a two-state solution more difficult to achieve.<sup>49</sup> The European Union has active interests and commitments in Palestine not least in the provision of very significant amounts of Foreign Aid to the Palestinian Authority. It is argued that the Government of Israel must understand that failure to respond to international concerns over compliance with international law with respect to the occupied territories will come at a cost to

41 [www.bdsmovement.net/divestment](http://www.bdsmovement.net/divestment)

42 The Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church in Britain manages investments of over £1 billion on behalf of Methodist organisations. The CFB is responsible for decisions on investment and disinvestment, but receives advice from the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) on ethical issues relating to investment. JACEI coordinates the development of ethical policies related to investment and reports to the Conference of the Methodist Church on its workings and comments on the performance of the CFB in managing its funds in accordance with the aims of the Methodist Church.

43 *Investment in Israel/Palestine CFB Policy Paper*, [www.cfbmethodistchurch.org.uk/downloads/policy\\_statements/cfb\\_israel\\_palestine\\_policy\\_statement.pdf](http://www.cfbmethodistchurch.org.uk/downloads/policy_statements/cfb_israel_palestine_policy_statement.pdf) See also Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) Discussion Paper [www.cfbmethodistchurch.org.uk/downloads/position\\_papers/jacei\\_israel\\_palestine\\_position\\_paper.pdf](http://www.cfbmethodistchurch.org.uk/downloads/position_papers/jacei_israel_palestine_position_paper.pdf)

44 This briefing makes reference to ‘occupation’ although the use of the term poses difficulties for some. The Methodist Church continues to speak of ‘illegal occupation’. This expression reflects the findings of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice in 2004 and the position of the UK and other governments.

45 Examples of potential measures include 1) placing limitations on government grant and loan co-operation as the EU has done on the Horizon 2020 research funding, 2) abolishing cooperation with Israeli defence companies such as Elbit Systems that is a part of the UK Watchkeeper drone programme, 3) placing a freeze on any upgrade in the status of diplomatic relations, ensuring that relations are based on the shared values of both parties, and particularly on respect for human rights and international law 4) suspending of the EU Israel Association Agreement until such time as negotiations on a final status agreement are concluded and the occupation brought to an end.

46 For example in May 2012 the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, while declining a call for divestment from three companies, nevertheless passed resolution 6073 calling on sanctions by all nations to “prohibit the import of products made by companies in Israeli settlements on Palestinian land” See also *Trading Away Peace supported by the Methodist Church in Britain* [www.methodist.org.uk/media/682958/israel-palestine-trading-away-peace-1012.pdf](http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/682958/israel-palestine-trading-away-peace-1012.pdf)

47 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion

48 The EU Israel Association Agreement provides preferential trade terms between Israel and the EU [www.eccpalestine.org/23-meps-call-for-suspension-of-eu-israel-association-agreement/](http://www.eccpalestine.org/23-meps-call-for-suspension-of-eu-israel-association-agreement/)

49 See [www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-office-minister-strongly-condemns-israeli-settlement-plans](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-office-minister-strongly-condemns-israeli-settlement-plans)

bilateral relationships.<sup>50</sup> A group of 26 former European leaders has suggested that the best way to help the US administration's efforts in resolving the conflict is to impose a penalty on Israel for attitudes and policies that run counter to the positions that the US president himself has advocated.<sup>51</sup>

## 8.2 Difficulties with perceptions of inconsistency in sanctions policy

It is argued that trade sanctions against Israel (which currently do not have much international support) would be unjust as this would be inconsistent with the approach taken to occupation in other contexts including China's occupation of Tibet, Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara and Turkey's occupation of northern Cyprus. Such comparisons are fraught with difficulty and therefore questions of consistency will always be contested.<sup>52</sup>

## 9. Inter faith relationships and the question of anti-Semitism

Of crucial importance to the worldwide Church is its relationships with Jews, Muslims and followers of other faiths and any support for BDS would have implications for our relationships with Jewish people. Christians and Jews share a common heritage extending well beyond the sharing of our scriptures. Our traditions are founded on a set of moral values including the dignity of each human being before God, our rights and responsibilities and the discipline of service for the benefit of others. There are many flourishing relationships between Methodist churches and Jewish synagogues that have enriched our experience of encounter with God and helped us to reflect on the role of faith in public life. However, our respective journeys over the past centuries have seen strife and persecution that require of the Christian church deep reflection and repentance for our attitude towards those outside of our own faith community.

### 9.1 A Church support for boycott will negatively impact Jewish/Christian relationships

The very notion of boycott recalls for many the Nazi organised boycott of 1933 when Hitler came to power. That boycott sought to rid the German economy of the Jews. Based on vicious anti-Semitism it led ultimately to the holocaust and consequently the term 'boycott' resonates painfully today. Any formal call for boycott from Churches strengthens a perception among some within the Jewish community that Christians are unwilling to counter anti-Semitism. This would present difficulties for relationships between Methodists and many in the Jewish community.

While it is argued in 3.1 that BDS does not treat Israel unfairly the perception among many Israelis is very different.

### 9.2 Problems associated with extremist groups

Campaigns sometimes attract the support of extreme fringe elements and the BDS campaign is no exception. There have been a few instances of disruptive demonstrations at Israeli cultural events and abuse directed at Israeli academics.

The actions of those who may have anti-Jewish motivations and are acting outside of the remit of the BDS Movement will cause further difficulty for institutions considering or supporting boycott and divestment. A focused boycott applied to goods and services that directly impact the occupation has more likelihood of maintaining distance from such actions.

## Conclusion

This briefing has set out to examine the call of the BDS Movement as directed by the 2013 Methodist Conference. We have acknowledged that, when a national Church institution issues criticism of the policies of the Government of Israel it can be perceived as hatred and victimisation of the Jewish people, although the intention may be very different.

Some might perceive that the intention of those supporting any form of BDS is to challenge the existence of the State of Israel. Section 3 questions this interpretation of the aims of the BDS Movement and suggests that this would be

50 See for example the letter of 15 EU leaders to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Ashton, September 2013.

51 Letter to the President of the European Council from the European Former Leaders Group (EFLG) 2 December 2010 [www.middleeastmonitor.com/resources/documents/1835-memo-publishes-full-letter-of-former-european-leaders-to-eu](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/resources/documents/1835-memo-publishes-full-letter-of-former-european-leaders-to-eu)

52 It should be noted that none of these situations offer direct comparisons to the situation in Israel/Palestine. For example, while the occupation of Northern Cyprus is made possible with the military intervention of Turkey, the people of Northern Cyprus do have a functioning system of self-governance within a clearly defined geographical area.

an unreliable characterisation of the supporters of BDS and an over-simplification of a difficult but critical issue, but it cannot be denied that overcoming this perception is challenging.

Boycott, divestment and sanction measures have been targeted differently by various groups. Such measures have either focused narrowly on economic exchange with Israeli settlements, or broadened to include any institution with a direct involvement in the occupation (such as an agricultural wholesaler for example), or more broadly still, against entities directly associated with the Government of Israel (such as a major university). Broad BDS measures targeted at the Government of Israel subscribe to the model of 'resistance' described in section 2.3. This briefing does not attempt to explore possible responses but acknowledges that individuals and organisations have responded in a variety of ways other than outright rejection of BDS or acceptance in full.<sup>53</sup>

Lastly we acknowledge that among members of the Methodist Church there is significant diversity of opinion on the questions associated with this situation.<sup>54</sup> Some cite strong theological and/or other objections to the BDS Movement.<sup>55</sup> Some are broadly sympathetic and others simply unsure. Sensitive dialogue is required as together Methodist members seek guidance on how to interpret the call of Micah to "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God" in this situation.<sup>56</sup>

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53 We have noted already the position taken by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in 2012 (see footnote under 8). As a further example Jewish Voice for Peace share the aims of the Palestinian-led BDS Movement but concentrate on campaigns that directly target Israel's occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and its blockade of the Gaza Strip in accordance with the organisation's policy and strategies.

54 200 members of the Methodist Church in Britain responded to the online consultation on BDS in October/November 2013.

55 The responses to the consultation indicated that Christian Zionism, ie the conviction that the "ingathering" of Jews in Israel is a prerequisite for the Second Coming of Jesus, is a strong influence for some Methodists. Some expressed uncritical support for Israeli Government policies but it is also evident that sympathy with Christian Zionism does not necessarily demand this response.

56 The Methodist report *Living with Contradictory Convictions in the Church* might assist Methodists in this respect. [www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co\\_living\\_with\\_contradictory\\_guide\\_0707.doc](http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co_living_with_contradictory_guide_0707.doc)