

Legislative History and Basic Policies

The Episcopal Church has adopted and published positions and policies regarding Israel and Palestine since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. General Convention articulated several core principles fairly early and these have continued largely unchanged. Additional statements have been adopted over the years in response to changes in the international political situation.

The General Conventions of 1949 and 1952 were attentive to the post-1948 status of Jerusalem and concerns regarding Arab refugees, both Muslim and Christian. After 1952, the Church turned attention to the area of relief work and began giving more earnestly to the Diocese of Jerusalem. Only a few Middle East peace-related resolutions were considered in this period (and none were adopted) until 1979, the year the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty was signed.

From 1979 forward, virtually every General Convention session discussed or adopted resolutions relating to Israel, Palestine, and Middle East conflict and peace (*see* Appendices). Core principles, expressed and reinforced repeatedly over the years since then include:

- **Free access to Jerusalem by people of all faiths.** This was first expressed by the General Convention in a 1949 resolution that called for the “internationalization” of Jerusalem.¹ More recent resolutions have called for safeguarding the city of Jerusalem as an inter-religious municipality.² Although not the most frequent resolution topic, it is a consistent policy element.
- **Justice and a homeland for Palestinians.** The 1949 resolution on Jerusalem advocated for relief and justice measures for Palestine, including the fixation of boundaries. In 1952 the General Convention discussed, but did not adopt, resolutions relating to peace in the Middle East and justice for the displaced Christian and Muslim Arabs. The proposed resolutions touched on permanent resettlement, compensation for the dispossessed, involvement of the UN and the US on behalf of those who were displaced, and the cooperation of Iraq, Syria, and Jordan. In the end, however, only the House of Bishops adopted a resolution setting a long-range goal for achieving justice for Arab refugees.³ Since 1979, General Convention has passed multiple resolutions stating support for the establishment of an independent State of Palestine.⁴
- **Support for the Christian community.** General Convention has consistently supported the wellbeing and rights of Christians who live in the region, many of them Anglicans, and many of them of Arab descent. In the context of Israel’s identity as a Jewish state, Christians represent a very specific minority in the region and within Israel. This topic has been on occasion raised as an independent concern, but it also appears within the context of the Good Friday offering rather than within policy resolutions on the topic of Israel and Palestine. The Good Friday Offering is specifically earmarked for the Diocese of Jerusalem and work in the Middle East.⁵

¹Journal, 1949, p.264-265; 1979 D089; 1994-A107A.

²*Acts of Convention*, 1991-A147

³Journal, 1952, p. 37; 147-148.

⁴See especially *Acts of Convention*: 1979-D089, 2000-B016.

⁵Journal, 1961, p. 37. The resolution instructs the National Council to report on the needs of the Anglican Church and the Orthodox Church in the Middle East and to recommend ways to meet those needs either through the Good Friday Offering or other means. Subsequent resolutions in 1964 iterated use of the Offering for Jerusalem, the East Mission and work in the Middle East (Journal 1964, p. 303). See also *Acts of Convention*: 1976-A044; 1988-D119, D182a; 2006-A015; 1991-A150.

- **The State of Israel.** The General Convention has consistently expressed support for recognition of the State of Israel and its right to be secure in its borders.⁶
- **The State of Palestine.** Resolutions have maintained that the two-state solution can be achieved through peaceful, bilateral negotiations between Israel and Palestine with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both States.⁷ The Episcopal Church has been clear that a solution achieved unilaterally, by force, or by outside forces is not acceptable.

More recent positions and policies include:

- **Christian-Jewish Relations.** From the 1970s forward, improved relations between Christians and Jews has been an unvarying pursuit of The Episcopal Church. Discussion begun in 1973 led by the Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations came to recognize that there were both religious and political-social dimensions in Jewish-Christian dialogues. As a result, the presiding officers agreed on the formation of an Advisory Committee to the Presiding Bishop on Christian-Jewish Relations.⁸ Since then, Convention has passed multiple resolutions on the topic of encouraging and improving interfaith dialogue and understanding.⁹
- **U.S. Foreign Aid.** Calls for transparency and accountability for the use of U.S. foreign aid, particularly with regard to any use of such funds that might be viewed as supporting Israel's occupation of the Occupied Territories.¹⁰
- **West Bank Settlements.** General Convention has supported the international call on Israel to cease the Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories and the demolition of Palestinian homes and property.¹¹
- **The Wall.** The Convention has opposed Israel's construction of the West Bank separation wall.¹²
- **Right of Return.** Legislation has incorporated a long-standing Palestinian claim to a right of return to their homeland for Palestinians and to restitution or compensation for the losses incurred in the diaspora.¹³

One of the Church's most powerful advocacy tools is its ability to invest (or divest) funds. Not surprisingly, the Church's one recent attempt at a comprehensive policy statement regarding Israel and Palestine was developed by a 2005 report by the Social Responsibility in Investments Committee, which captured the policies that have guided Church policies on investments in the region.¹⁴ The report iterates many of the points noted above, but draws attention to the following specific resolutions:

⁶*Acts of Convention*, 1988-D053.

⁷*Acts of Convention*: 1991-A147; 2000-B016; 2012-B019; Executive Council minutes, June 2002.

⁸*Journal of the General Convention*, 1973, pp. 504-505; Episcopal News Service (ENS) release June 15, 1973.

⁹*Acts of Convention*: 1976-D081; 1979-D079, A044; 1991-D181; 1994-A102; 1997-D055; 2015-A018.

¹⁰*Acts of Convention*: 1991-A149; 1991-D008; 2012-A015.

¹¹*Acts of Convention*: 1994-D065; 2003-D008.

¹²*Acts of Convention*, 2003-D081.

¹³*Acts of Convention*, 2000-B016.

¹⁴*Corporate Engagement by the Episcopal Church on Issues Related to Israel and the Palestinian Territories, A Report with Recommendations*, Social Responsibility in Investments Committee of Executive Council, October 3, 2005.

- Reiterates support of a just peace that guarantees Israel's security and Palestinian aspirations for a viable sovereign state with Jerusalem as the shared capital of both Israel and Palestine (EC06/02).
- Recognizes that the Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes is illegal under international law and is a deterrent to the peace process (GC 2003).
- Recognizes the Israeli separation wall under construction as an impediment to a final and comprehensive negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (GC2003).
- Condemns the violence of suicide bombers and the violence of the Occupation and plead with both sides to pursue all avenues of negotiation based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 (EC 06/02).
- Recognizes the Israeli policy of building settlements in the Occupied Territories thwarts the peace process. All settlement activities should cease immediately (EC 06/02).
- Calls on Israel to remove road blocks to free access to Jerusalem for Palestinians and to allow Palestinians equal rights to build housing and institutions in Jerusalem (GC 1997).
- States that any resolution of the question of Jerusalem must equally respect the claims of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity and result in a shared city (EC 06/95).
- Urges congregations to develop mutual understanding and respect with Jews and Muslims, and to discuss the Middle East (GC 1994).
- Affirms the right of return principle for every Palestinian and the right of Palestinians and Israelis to self determination, independence and sovereignty (GC 2000).

Recent Legislation Affecting Policies and Advocacy

The policy direction set in place by the 2005 report of the Social Responsibility in Investments Committee became the dominant formulation on the Israel-Palestine question for the next decade. The policy was reaffirmed between 2011 and 2015, beginning with Presiding Bishop Schori's October, 2011 pastoral letter on Israeli-Palestinian peace.¹⁵ Her pastoral letter was prompted by a deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations due to the settlement issue and the increased agitation for a different strategy from concerned Church members. The letter was followed the next month by a "fact sheet" published by the Office of Government Relations focusing on the issues of borders, security, water, the rights of Palestinian refugees, and the Israeli settlements.¹⁶ The pastoral letter and fact sheet reaffirmed the Church's previous policies, especially on bilateral negotiations to achieve a just and lasting peace.

A contentious debate in 2012 led to an omnibus resolution that combined 12 resolutions in 2012-B019, that was adopted with a package of advocacy measures which built on previous policies and practices.¹⁷

¹⁵Presiding Bishop Schori's Pastoral Letter, October 3, 2011: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/episcopal-church-presiding-bishop-issues-pastoral-letter-israeli-palestinian>

¹⁶More Info: Questions and Answers about Major Issues in the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, November 7, 2011: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/article/more-info-questions-and-answers-about-major-issues-arab-israeli-palestinian-conflict>

¹⁷*Acts of Convention*, [2012-B019](#). This resolution was oddly matched by a divestment resolution D060 that was defeated in the House of Deputies on a paper ballot vote. D060 was amended by the same Legislative Committee as B019, and may have been reported to the floor as a goodwill gesture as it was accompanied by a Minority Report that severely lamented the Convention's failure to recognize the voice of Palestinians in the divestment argument.

These included a call for renewal of peace negotiations, interfaith dialogue, local action within dioceses regarding relations with local Jewish and Muslim congregations, development of resource lists, and continued pilgrimage and study. Perhaps the most significant measures related to financial investments in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, financial support for the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, and a loan of at least \$200,000 to strengthen the economic infrastructure of the Palestinian territories.

The importance of resolution 2012-B019 was highlighted by the appointment of the Executive Council B019 Coordinating Committee to assure effective implementation of the measures. The Coordinating Committee consisted of the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies, the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Advocacy and Networking for Mission, the Chair of the Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns, the Chair of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations, one member of the House of Bishops' Theology Committee, and DFMS staff.

The B019 Coordinating Committee's report to General Convention in 2015 noted areas of progress as well as areas that did not move forward as intended.¹⁸ Greater than anticipated progress was made with positive investment in the Palestinian territories when the Economic Justice Loan Committee invested savings of \$500,000 in the Bank of Palestine, which in turn supported community-level business opportunities and economic development in the Occupied Territories. The Office of Justice and Advocacy Ministries (JAM) moved forward promptly to produce a seven-part educational series for Episcopalians and engaged in direct advocacy with Congress, the White House, and the State Department to promote the Church's positions. The Presiding Bishop's office sponsored leadership-level interfaith dialogue, inviting prominent Muslim and Jewish leaders to spend time with the House of Bishops during the triennium and receiving similar invitations from two major Jewish organizations.¹⁹

Lack of funding and personnel support impeded progress in other areas. Due to lack of resources, the House of Bishops Theology Committee declined to take on the task of producing an educational resource in the form of an annotated bibliography. Likewise, funding was not forthcoming from the DFMS Program area to support local Church peace studies or to gather intelligence on diocesan and local efforts for a report back to General Convention.²⁰

Debate over Divestment

The 2005 report of the Social Responsibility in Investments Committee has held sway on the matter of divestment. The Church has pursued a policy of "corporate engagement" and "positive investment" rather than divestment, boycotts, or sanctions. Companies whose investments are viewed as unaligned with The Episcopal Church's policies are asked to engage with social responsibility in investment representatives. The B019 Coordinating Committee endorsed the existing policy of corporate dialogue and positive investment in its 2015 report to Convention. While acknowledging that some Episcopalians strongly advocated economic sanctions, it re-stated a 2013 Executive Council position that "this Church does not support boycott, divestment, and economic sanctions against the state of Israel nor any application of the Church's corporate-engagement policies toward such ends."²¹

In reaction to the General Convention's *status quo* response of 2012, Church members in other quarters began to advocate for the application of financial and investment pressures as a way of asserting the

¹⁸Executive Council Coordinating Committee [Report](#) (ECCC Report), *Blue Book* 2015.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 202.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 203.

Church's positions. In 2013, bishops, priests, and deputies signed and circulated an influential letter entitled "A Prophetic Challenge to the Executive Council." The letter petitioned for a more vigorous implementation of existing policies, including 1991-A149, which requires accountability of the State of Israel for use of U.S. government aid in compliance with the Foreign Assistance Act, and the Church's corporate engagement policies, to ensure that Church financial resources were not being used to support the occupation.²² A preliminary draft of the letter of petition was obtained a few days in advance of its release, which elicited a response from Presiding Bishop Schori and the Office of Government Relations. The response reaffirmed their commitment to the effectiveness and appropriateness of existing policies.²³

Numerous proponents of divestment attended the 2015 Legislative Committee hearings and expressed their views.²⁴ The Convention adopted two resolutions, both of which aligned with existing policies regarding the Diocese of Jerusalem, the policy of positive investment, support of US government's negotiating efforts, education, and restorative justice. An omnibus resolution calling for withholding financial investment in the occupied territories failed to pass its initial referral in the House of Bishops.

Conclusion

The Episcopal Church has consistently stated a set of core policies with regard to Israel and Palestine. Key advocacy measures in support of peace between Israel and Palestine have included ongoing financial support for the Diocese of Jerusalem; communicating the Church's position to US leaders; collaborating and coordinating with other groups that share similar advocacy visions (both within the Anglican Communion and ecumenical partners); and encouraging both study and financial support at the diocesan and congregational level. The Church's ongoing hope has been for a negotiated two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. Financial policies regarding Israel and Palestine have aligned with the practice of corporate engagement and positive investment. There has been increasing pressure for a change in that policy, but the 2015 General Convention affirmed the policy as the Church's most effective stance.

²²ENS release, January 21, 2013.

²³ENS release, January 17, 2013.

²⁴In light of the ecumenical contact regarding the issue in previous years, it should be noted that TEC's discussions took place against the backdrop of the Presbyterian Church USA's adoption in June 2014 of a divestment resolution (2014 item 04-04) on West Bank corporate investments (Minutes of the 221st General Assembly, pp. 58-60 and 260-262)

Appendix A. Select General Convention Resolutions relating to Israel and Palestine (1961 –2015)

Note: This selected list omits courtesy resolutions, most resolutions on Jerusalem Sunday and the Good Friday Offering, and resolutions not directly related to the relationship of Israel and Palestine.

- 2015-A018: Encourage Church-wide Engagement in Interfaith Competence
- [2015-B013](#): Reaffirm a Policy of Reconciliation and Restorative Justice in the Middle East
- 2015-C018: Affirm the Work of Christians in Israel and the Occupied Territories
- [2012-B019](#): Support Israeli-Palestinian Peace
- 2009-A037: Pray for the Wall Around Bethlehem to Come Down
- 2006-A015: Encourage a Renewed Commitment to the Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East
- [2003-D008](#): Urge Israel to End Policy of Demolition of Palestinian Homes
- [2003-D081](#): Oppose Construction of the Israeli Security Wall
- [2000-B016](#): Affirm Refugee Rights of Palestinians and Israelis
- [1997-A107](#): Recognize Jerusalem as the Capital of Both Israel and Palestine
- 1994-A102: Urge Congregations Into Conversations With Jews and Muslims
- [1994-A103](#): Affirm 1993 Israeli-PLO Declaration of Principles
- 1994-D065: Recognize Illegality of Israeli Settlements in Gaza and the West Bank
- [1991-A147](#): Support a Two-state Solution for Israel and the Palestinian People
- [1991-A149](#): Urge a Full Accounting of the Use of Foreign Aid in the Middle East
- 1991-A150: Support an Anglican Presence in the Middle East
- [1991-D008](#): Urge a Peaceful Resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
- [1991-D007](#): Urge Study on Long-term Support for Church in Middle East
- 1991-D122: Distinguish Between Criticism of Israeli Policy and Expression of Anti-Jewish Prejudice
- 1991-D130: Affirm Commitment to Religious Liberty in Middle East
- [1988-D053](#): Affirm Goals of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation for Israelis and Palestinians
- 1988-D119: Urge Financial Relief of and Interest in the Diocese of Jerusalem
- 1985-B017: Oppose Moving the United States Embassy From Tel Aviv to Jerusalem
- [1982-B047](#): Call for Peace in the Middle East
- 1979-A044: Initiate a Study on Episcopal-Jewish Relations
- [1979-D089](#): Express Thankfulness for Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty
- 1979-D148: Designate Holy Week Offering for Use in the Middle East
- 1976-A044: Designate Good Friday Offering for the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East
- 1964:** (Journal, p. 303): A resolution that instructs the Executive Council to appropriate not less than \$15,000 annually to the Jerusalem and East Mission from the Good Friday Offering and to use any balance left after all appropriations have been made for work in the Middle East.
- 1961:** (Journal, p. 373): A resolution instructing the National Council to make a report to the next General Convention concerning the needs of the Anglican Church in the Holy Land and the Orthodox Church in the Middle East and make a recommendation for meeting those needs either through the Good Friday Offering or other means and ensure that publicity materials accurately reflect the scope of those needs.

Appendix B. Select Resolves of Council relating to Israel and Palestine (1981-2014)

Note: This selected list omits courtesy resolutions, most resolutions on Jerusalem Sunday and the Good Friday Offering, and resolutions not directly related to the relationship of Israel and Palestine.

- [EXC102014.36](#): Support for Peace Between Israel and Palestine
- EXC022013.21: Implementation of General Convention Resolution B019
- [EXC062011.06](#): Support for a Just and Lasting Peace Between Israel and Palestine
- [EXC022010.24](#): Support for Peace Between Israel and Palestine
- EXC022008.16: Support for the Palestine and Israel Joint Understanding
- EXC032007.04: Concern for Violence in the Middle East
- [EXC112006.25](#): Reaffirmation of Commitment to Peace in Israel/Palestine
- [EXC112006.26](#): Policies Regarding the Palestine/Israel Peace Process
- EXC102005.01: Commend Committee on Social Responsibility in Investments
- EXC062005.31: Devotion of a General Convention Evening to Israel-Palestine Issues
- EXC012003.05: Opposition of Bombing in Gaza
- [EXC062002.19](#): Support for Israel and Palestine Peace Process
- EXC102001.10: Response to September 11, 2001
- EXC022001.18: Support for Peace in the Holy Land
- [EXC102000.12](#): Support for Reconciliation Between Israel and Palestine
- [EXC061995.12](#): Support for Peace Process in Jerusalem
- [EXC041991.10](#): Reconciliation Between Palestine and Israel
- [EXC011991.19](#): Support for Palestinians
- EXC011991.16: Peace in the Middle East
- [EXC061990.30](#): Support for Dialogue Between Israelis and Palestinians
- [EXC021989.33](#): Support for Palestinian Refugees in Israel
- [EXC051988.33](#): Concern for the Situation in the Middle East
- EXC111987.27: Support for ACC Resolution on Palestine/Israel
- EXC111986.20: Request for Study on Palestinian Arab Christians
- EXC101984.08: Opposition to the Move of the U.S. Embassy in Israel
- [EXC021981.16](#): NCCUSA and DFMS Policy Statements on the Middle East