

September 16, 2019

Dear Members of Congress,

As US-based Christian churches and agencies, we write to reaffirm the principles and position stated in our letter of November 6, 2017 (attached). As we stated in our earlier letter, “‘Anti-BDS’ legislation, if adopted, would put legal obstacles in the way of nonviolent peaceful action meant to bring about social change, and would legislate against the freedom to make choices in the stewardship of our financial resources.” We believe that the Combating BDS Act included in S. 1 would indeed impede such nonviolent peaceful action in support of peace and justice, opposing the continuing injustices visited upon Palestinians living under illegal Israeli military occupation. The passage of H.Res. 246 puts the House on record in support of such a stance.

We write, therefore, to assert and affirm our strong support for the right to make decisions about the stewardship of our financial resources, in accordance with our faith values. We are heartened by the introduction of H.Res. 496 (“Affirming that all Americans have the right to participate in boycotts in pursuit of civil and human rights at home and abroad, as protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution”), and urge you to support its passage. It is fully consistent with our faith values and church policies and, we believe, with our Constitutional rights, to use our economic leverage in support of peace and justice any- and everywhere, including in the context of Israel/Palestine.

We are concerned that, since we last wrote to you on this issue, the US Administration has taken several unilateral actions to undermine the possibility of a just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, punish Palestinians living under military occupation and refugees, and further diminish the quest for peace, justice, and equality for the people there. We observe, too, with concern, Israeli efforts to intensify the occupation, by their recent announcement of more than 2000 new West Bank settlement units and the indication that annexation of parts of the West Bank could follow.

Israel’s recent denial of entry of two US Congresswomen is particularly troubling, especially given the US Congress’ allocation of more than \$3.8 billion in military aid to Israel each year. Congress has a responsibility to ensure that Israel is compliant with US law in the use of those funds, and the inability of two elected Congresspersons to enter the country hinders their ability to do their jobs and hold an ally accountable. We therefore also urge that the US Congress hold Israel to the same standards of accountability in the provision of aid that it does with other recipient countries, enforcing the same conditions and expectations set forth by US law.

Finally, the denial of entry of the two Congresswomen is not a unique case. People with Palestinian heritage and others who are knowledgeable of Israeli practices of occupation have been denied access both to Israel and the US. For us, this is an issue of free speech, and we are concerned that this right is threatened, both in this country and by an ally which is often commended for “sharing our democratic values.”

For decades, we have supported peace, justice, and equal rights for all people living in Israel/Palestine. We have worked to support efforts to promote these principles through

nonviolence and continue to hope for and believe that a just resolution is possible. But our hope is not the same as optimism.

We ask that you consider seriously the issues we have raised here. And we pray and yearn for the day when Israel/Palestine enjoys the peace and justice each human being deserves.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
Mennonite Church USA
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, Church of the Brethren
Pax Christi USA
Presbyterian Church (USA)
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society