



## Q&A

### 1. **What is Unsettling Goods about?**

The 41st General Council in August 2012 called on United Church people to take concrete actions to support the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Unsettling Goods invites congregations and individuals to “Pray, Choose, Speak for Peace in Palestine and Israel” by engaging in a range of actions that support a just peace, including joining in worship, prayer, and study; taking economic action focused on settlement goods; supporting trust-building programs between Palestinians and Israelis; and promoting congregational conversations with Palestinian and Jewish Canadians. Information and resources about Unsettling Goods are available on the United Church website ([www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/unsettling-goods-choose-peace-palestine-and-israel](http://www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/unsettling-goods-choose-peace-palestine-and-israel)).

While the 41st General Council of the United Church approved a range of actions as described above, many of the questions below are about the economic action component of Unsettling Goods given that concerns are most frequently expressed about this part of the initiative.

### 2. **Why are you taking economic action against Israeli settlement products?**

International law prohibits an occupying power from transferring its own civilians into occupied territory, and the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice have ruled that Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories are a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention ([www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/5fldpj.htm](http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/5fldpj.htm)). Both the United Nations ([www.un.org/news](http://www.un.org/news), 13 November 2013) and the Canadian government (“Canada and the Middle East Peace Process,” [www.international.gc.ca](http://www.international.gc.ca)) state that the settlements are a serious obstacle to peace in the region.

The United Church of Canada has identified the occupation as a major contributor to the injustice that underlies the violence in the region, and is encouraging its members to take a range of actions to support the end of the occupation, including avoiding products produced in the settlements. Companies that operate in settlements provide economic support for the government of Israel’s practice of establishing settlements in Palestinian territory. That’s why the United Church is joining other churches and non-governmental organizations around the world to support peace in Israel and Palestine by taking economic action against products made in Israeli settlements.

### 3. **How can I tell if a product has been made in the settlements?**

Many products sold in Canada that are manufactured in the settlements are labelled as “Made in Israel,” making it difficult for concerned consumers and retailers to make purchasing and sourcing decisions that support peace. That’s why The United Church of Canada has asked the federal government to require that products produced in Israeli settlements be clearly identified and distinguished from products made in Israel. To learn more, see our Take Action ([www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/regulate-products-illegal-settlements-palestine-and-israel](http://www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/regulate-products-illegal-settlements-palestine-and-israel)).



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#### 4. **Which companies and products are you focusing on for economic action?**

This initiative focuses on products manufactured by Ahava and Keter that are made in or related to the settlements and widely sold in Canada. Ahava makes skincare products such as moisturizing creams, sunscreen, and bath salts. Keter makes plastic tool sheds, fences, patio furniture, toolboxes, storage bins, garden products such as planters, toys, and kitchen and bathroom goods.

#### 5. **How did you choose the companies that are part of this action?**

Both companies have major production facilities in an Israeli settlement. Their products are sold in major retail stores across Canada, which enables a wide spectrum of consumer participation. These companies' products are also the focus of economic action by other churches, including the United Methodist and Presbyterian churches in the United States.

In March 2016, Ahava announced plans to relocate its manufacturing plant from an illegal West Bank settlement to inside the pre-1967 lines. It's estimated that it will take two years for Ahava to build its new plant. Continued pressure on Ahava is needed until the West Bank facility is fully closed.

#### 6. **Have you contacted the companies whose products you have chosen to boycott?**

Yes. Staff sent letters to both companies that expressed the concerns of the 41st General Council, urged the companies to cease production in the settlements and invited them into conversation about the church's concerns. Neither of the companies has fully addressed the United Church's concerns about ongoing production in the settlements supporting the occupation.

#### 7. **Don't some of the companies in the settlements provide jobs to Palestinians?**

Yes, some do. However, one needs to look at the bigger picture: the illegal settlements are built on land that was confiscated from Palestinians, in many cases displacing Palestinians and eliminating their livelihood. A recent World Bank report ("Fiscal Crisis, Economic Prospects," [unispal.un.org](http://unispal.un.org)) stated that the greatest impediment to a sustainable Palestinian economy is the set of restrictions imposed by the Israelis through the occupation. The report notes that if even 3 percent of Israeli-controlled Area C (Area C comprises 61 percent of the West Bank) was given over to Palestinians for agriculture, 150,000 to 200,000 jobs would be created. Palestinian trade unions and labour organizations have joined calls for global economic action to help end the occupation.

Given the high rates of unemployment in the West Bank, it is not surprising that Palestinians accept work in settlement factories to earn a living. What must be considered is the type of Palestinian economy that could emerge if they did not live under occupation.



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### 8. **Do these companies manufacture products in places other than the settlements?**

All of Ahava's production is currently based in the Mitzpe Shalem settlement.

Keter Plastic has two manufacturing plants in the settlement of Barkan but also many other plants around the world, including several in Israel.

### 9. **Doesn't this mean that potentially you will be boycotting products that are made in Israel?**

This is why the need for accurate labelling is so important. We are making every effort to limit our economic action to products that are manufactured in the settlements. To do this we need the cooperation of the companies that have production facilities elsewhere. We are asking those companies whose products are labelled "Made in Israel" to provide a list of products that are made in the settlements so consumers can distinguish them. Moderator Jordan Cantwell wrote to Stéphane Dion, Minister of Foreign Affairs ([www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/regulate-products-illegal-settlements-palestine-and-israel](http://www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/regulate-products-illegal-settlements-palestine-and-israel)) asking that Canada require products produced in Israeli settlements in the West Bank to be clearly identified and distinguished from products made in Israel, and that settlement products be exempt from beneficial treatment under the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA).

### 10. **Isn't an economic boycott of settlement products the same as a boycott of Israel?**

No. We are not recommending a boycott of Israel or of Israeli goods. Our focus is on goods produced in the settlements. We believe that economic action against the occupation is warranted. Such action needs to be focused specifically against the products of the occupation and needs to raise awareness that the occupation cannot be justified. The goal of such action needs to be clearly defined: that it is immoral and unethical to support the existence of the settlements, and all products produced in or related to the settlements should be avoided.

### 11. **Are you encouraging shoppers to boycott retailers who refuse to stop selling these companies' products?**

No. The 41st General Council resolution called for consumers to avoid purchasing products produced in or related to the settlements. It does not call for a boycott of retailers selling those products. Consumers are being encouraged to urge the selected retailers to stop selling settlement products. In May 2013, staff sent letters to four Canadian retailers: The Bay, Canadian Tire, Home Depot, and Walmart. Walmart was the only retailer that agreed to meet with us. In November 2015, staff once again contacted Canadian Tire regarding Keter Plastic products carried in Canadian Tire stores. Although Canadian Tire responded by saying that the Keter products carried in their stores are not manufactured in factories in Israeli settlements, we encouraged the corporation to use its relationship with Keter to press them to withdraw completely from the settlements.



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### 12. **Is this initiative being promoted beyond the United Church to the general public?**

Our primary focus is United Church people, but others are certainly invited to take part.

### 13. **Is anyone else involved in this kind of action around settlements?**

The World Council of Churches has called on its member churches to consider a boycott of settlement products. The United Methodist Church (USA), the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Methodist Church in Britain, the British Friends (Quakers), and the South African Council of Churches have all adopted similar policies. So have many European churches. More information about what other churches are doing can be found on our What Are Other Churches Doing page ([www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/what-are-other-churches-doing-palestine-and-israel](http://www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/what-are-other-churches-doing-palestine-and-israel)).

Denmark and South Africa now require settlement products to be clearly identified and labelled as such. The United Kingdom has a voluntary code for this kind of identification. In March 2013, the Dutch government advised local supermarket chains to label any product from the territories to avoid misleading customers. The European Union (EU) is debating new rules, anticipated for release in 2013, that would ensure products from the settlements sold in EU countries are labelled as such.

Jewish organizations have also called for this kind of action. Some Liberal Jewish Zionist organizations have expressed concerns about the risk of the settlement project to the Jewish identity of Israel. Canadian Friends of Peace Now is one of those groups that, while not endorsing the United Church's economic action initiative, supports the church's recommendations concerning the settlements. Other Jewish organizations and individuals have adopted similar approaches. In his recent book *The Crisis of Zionism*, Peter Beinart, an orthodox Jewish commentator, calls for a boycott of settlement products. Dr. Alon Liel, the former Israeli Ambassador to South Africa, has similarly supported a boycott of settlement products.

### 14. **What did the United Church's 42nd General Council (in August 2015) say about Palestine and Israel?**

The will of the 42nd General Council is for the church to focus the current strategies and actions to address the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories by the state of Israel by:

- initiating and developing a program of education and advocacy, in cooperation with our partners, related to divestment from and economic sanctions against all corporations and institutions complicit in or benefitting from the illegal occupation. This would include education about tourism which bolsters the oppression of Palestinians;
- developing and implementing an ethical divestment strategy from companies that derive substantial financial benefit or that contribute significantly to furthering the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and recommends to the United Church of Canada, its Pension Fund and Foundation and other related bodies including congregations to divest from companies that derive substantial financial benefit from the illegal Israeli occupation; and



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- encouraging all courts, bodies and members of The United Church of Canada to apply such divestment strategies and sanctions, until such time as the occupation of the Palestinian territories ends.

### 15. **What else can I do to support peace in the region?**

Unsettling Goods invites congregations and individuals to “Pray, Choose, Speak for Peace in Palestine and Israel” by engaging in a range of actions that support a just peace. In addition to economic action against settlement products, these actions also include joining in worship, prayer, and study; supporting Palestinian livelihoods by purchasing fair-trade products or planting olive trees; supporting trust-building programs between Palestinians and Israelis; visiting the Holy Land to learn about peaceful steps to end the occupation; and inviting a United Church member who has visited or lived in Palestine/Israel to speak with your congregation. Congregations are also invited to deepen and strengthen relationships with Jewish and Palestinian Canadians. Information and resources about Unsettling Goods are available on our website ([www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/unsettling-goods-choose-peace-palestine-and-israel](http://www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/unsettling-goods-choose-peace-palestine-and-israel)).

### 16. **Why is the United Church involving itself in Middle East affairs?**

The United Church has had a long relationship with the region and with Palestinian Christians. One of the United Church’s past Moderators, the late Dr. Bob McClure, was a medical missionary in Gaza in the late 1940s. United Church overseas personnel have served there, most recently connected with the Heads of Churches of Jerusalem and with the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. Many hundreds of United Church people have also visited the region and expressed concern for what they see happening.

Palestinian Christians have also specifically asked for help and for action. ([www.kairopalestine.ps](http://www.kairopalestine.ps)). They have said that the situation in Israel and Palestine is at a crisis point. Like all Palestinians, they are suffering under an oppressive military occupation. In particular, they are concerned that Christians are disappearing from the land where Christ lived. They are direct in telling us that the issue is not with Muslims—it is the military occupation by Israel that is the problem.

### 17. **What does this type of political activity have to do with the Christian faith?**

The church has a gospel mandate to participate in God’s mission to work for justice and peace. Palestinian-Christian partners also challenge us with the reality that some Christian theologies (mainly in the US and Canada) support the occupation, encourage and raise funds for the creation of Israeli settlements, and lobby against any recognition of a Palestinian state. They have named these Christian Zionist theologies as false and heretical teaching. While the situation of Israel and Palestine has significant political realities, Christian theology, practice, and relationships are a central part of what is at stake.



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### 18 **How do you respond to the accusation that the United Church's critique of Israel is antisemitic?**

The United Church of Canada is committed to seeking a just peace in Palestine and Israel. We do not believe that criticism of Israel is evidence of antisemitism. However, when criticism seeks to delegitimize or demonize Israel, it can and should be questioned.

The 41st General Council upheld the United Church's long commitment to deepening relationships and supporting the voices of Palestinian Christians, coupled with a deep concern for the welfare and security of Israel. The Council affirmed continuing support for a two-state solution to resolve the turmoil in the region and as a way of offering security and justice for all of its peoples. The Council named the occupation, begun in 1967, as a major contributor to the injustice that underlies the violence of the region. It also denounced the ongoing aggression and incitement to violence toward the state of Israel and its people, and all questions of Israel's right to exist or that seek to undermine its legitimacy as a state. The Council reaffirmed the church's long-standing call for the rejection of all forms of violence, incitement to violence, and teaching of hatred on all sides. It also maintained the decade-long policy of the United Church in affirming Israel as a Jewish state.

The United Church condemns actions and activities that seek to delegitimize or demonize Israel. Criticisms of Israel vary significantly and must be judged by their intent. Criticism that questions Israel's right to exist or that seeks to undermine its legitimacy as a state is unacceptable. Actions and language that demonize Israel are not helpful and can, in some cases, be antisemitic. Holding Israel, like any other modern democratic state, accountable for its actions is one way civil society strengthens democracy and justice. The United Church's Jewish partners tell us that false accusations of antisemitism that seek to silence any criticism of the occupation also undermine the pursuit of a just peace. The United Church has firmly stated that all states, including the State of Israel, are obliged to abide by international law.

### 19. **Why does the United Church's focus on Israel seem so disproportionate compared with any number of other worse situations in the world?**

The United Church responds to many situations around the world. In the past several years the church has issued statements and called for action regarding issues of concern in Canada, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, the Philippines, India, El Salvador, the border regions of Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Korea.

In May 2013, the United Church was one of 24 Canadian churches that signed a letter from the Canadian Council of Churches to Prime Minister Stephen Harper calling the Canadian government to respond to crises in the Middle East, including "the continuing humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Syria; the uncertainty and turmoil with democratic transitions in Egypt; the unresolved decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and the rising tensions and stresses within and between various countries in the region."

In the case of Syria, we do not have partners there but work with a regional partner—the Middle East Council of Churches (which has member churches in Syria)—ACT Alliance, and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB), all of which are deeply concerned by the crisis and are providing humanitarian aid to the Syrian people.



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Throughout the world, the United Church works with local partners who know the situations in depth. In the larger Middle East region, the United Church works with the Near East Council of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches, all of which represent a large number of Christians.

### 20. **Why isn't the United Church focusing on the situation of Christians elsewhere in the Middle East? What about Christians in Egypt or Syria?**

The United Church is a member of the World Council of Churches, which actively supports Christians throughout the Middle East. We are also an active partner with the Middle East Council of Churches, which represents many Christian communities in the region.

Whenever we respond to requests for action or assistance in this region, we believe it is important to listen to what Christians in the various countries of the Middle East are themselves saying and asking. The critical question is what will help their situation? It is the Christians in the region themselves who must determine what help they need and what will make a difference in their lives. Otherwise we risk making things worse. With this caveat in mind, the United Church is supporting humanitarian relief efforts throughout the Middle East, in particular, efforts addressing the needs of citizens forced from their homes by civil conflict. It is doing this in concert with other Canadian organizations and the Canadian government.

For example the United Church, in response to calls from the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches, currently maintains an active church-wide appeal in support of Syrians (including Christians) violently uprooted from their homes by the lingering civil war in that country. Funds raised by the appeal have been distributed to the Middle East Council of Churches and other organizations that are working on the ground to bring relief to uprooted Syrians, including Christians. For more information on the United Church appeal for Syria, visit our Syria Refugee Appeal page ([www.united-church.ca/syria](http://www.united-church.ca/syria)). The United Church of Canada also continues to make available opportunities and support to congregations who are willing to offer protection to refugees in the form of resettlement through refugee sponsorship under its Sponsorship Agreement with the Government of Canada. The crisis in Syria has not only caused the internal displacement and forced migration of over 2 million Syrians into neighbouring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, but has also caused further displacement of hundreds of thousands of other displaced populations (Palestinians, Iranian and Iraqi Christians, South Sudanese, Somalis, just to name a few) who were refugees inside and outside Syria. For more information on refugee sponsorship see our Sponsor a Refugee page ([www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/sponsor-refugee](http://www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/sponsor-refugee)).

Together with churches in Canada and around the world, the United Church also has called on governments in the Middle East to ensure the safety and security of all people living in conflict areas like Syria, especially vulnerable and minority groups, including Christians.



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L'Église Unie du Canada