



General Council News

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Israel/Palestine One Step Closer

by Kevin Cox

The United Church has taken another step towards adopting a contentious policy that includes a boycott of products from the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

On August 15, 2012, General Council affirmed 12 recommendations that call for an end to violence and incitement to hatred by both Palestinians and Israelis in the disputed territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. The recommendations also call for identifying products from the settlements and boycotting them.



The United Church of Canada

Bruce Gregersen

The final empowering motion to formally adopt the recommendations and direct United Church policies and actions in relation to Israel and Palestine will come back before General Council on Friday, August 17, said Bruce Gregersen, General Council Officer for Programs, after the meeting.

"We are in a lengthy process of a very important piece of work and we will come back to it on Friday," he said.

He said the mind of General Council seems to support the adoption of recommendations that include identifying the settlements in the West Bank as a primary cause of injustice in the region and a boycott of products from those settlements.

The Council added two additions to the list of recommended actions. These additions denounce violence and incitement of hatred by Palestinians or Israelis and denounce all questions of Israel's right to exist that seek to undermine its existence as a state. These two amendments passed by a narrow margin.

Moderator Mardi Tindal noted that few speakers came forward when she called for final discussion of the proposals, which had already been vetted by the Council on August 14. The Council affirmed the key recommendations of the report, including the recommendations on boycott, however, the final action is yet to take place.

The possibility of a boycott sparked impassioned debate.

"If we accept boycott as a means of resolution we are completely and entirely shifting from our positive and constructive nature that builds up and encourages others to a nature of punishment and negativity," said Adam Brown from Bay of Quinte Conference, noting there are other positive options for action.

Gregersen said that if the church endorses a boycott from the Israeli settlements, members will still be able to make up their own minds about following that lead.

He noted that the church has prompted a debate across the country on these issues.

"For the General Council to say that we believe there needs to be action against settlement products is a significant voice in Canadian society and it's an encouragement to United Church members to take that seriously," Gregersen said.



Council Categorically Rejects Northern Gateway Pipeline

by Christine Johnson

The 41st General Council has instructed Nora Sanders, the United Church's General Secretary, to make a public statement "categorically" rejecting construction of the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline, which has a proposed route stretching from northern Alberta to Kitimat, British Columbia.

Due to the timely nature of the pipeline review hearings, commissioners asked that this be accomplished soon. In addition, Sanders has been asked to communicate this decision to all courts of the church, the governments of Canada, Alberta, and British Columbia, Enbridge, and all Canadians through media outlets.

Initiated by the Native Ministries Council of British Columbia Conference, the proposal was brought forward to this Council meeting by the All Native Circle Conference. The decision was made by Council delegates meeting in one of three decision-making bodies called commissions on August 14.

According to Jim White of British Columbia Conference, one of the biggest environmental concerns is the size of the ships required to transport the crude oil to China. He said super oil tankers are expected to be much larger than the Exxon Valdez, a ship that ran aground and spilled oil in the waters near Alaska in 1989. He said his community is fearful about an-

other possible spill and the environmental damage that would result.

Joan Smith of Manitou Conference asked the commissioners about their financial connection to Enbridge. "Have you checked your mutual funds?" she asked. "Are they invested in Enbridge? And if they are, are you prepared to let them go?" Another commissioner wondered if the United Church would be asking the members of their congregations to sell their shares in Enbridge.

Ray Jones, Chair of the British Columbia Native Ministries Council, said the current federal government is doing everything it can to make sure this pipeline goes through. The oil and natural resources will not benefit Aboriginal people, he said, because the oil is being moved offshore to be refined. In terms of environmental issues, he explained that the waters around Kitimat are very treacherous in terms of weather and geography.

Bill Calder of Alberta and Northwest Conference said he understood the fragile ecology in the area, but also sees the value of getting oil to Asia. He said he is concerned about the word "categorical" since there are always risks and benefits to any proposal. He asked to make an amendment to the motion removing the word "categorically" and asking for a "rejection as currently proposed." This was ruled out of order because it would change the substance of the motion.

Some discussion centred on the issue of our dependence on oil. On one side, commissioners said it was unrealistic for us to reject this project outright because we all depend on oil. For Joan MacLeod of Maritime Conference the argument had another side. "We're not against oil per se but the shipping of raw bitumen through pristine Native land to the West Coast so it can be processed in China. I think that's a very important distinction." She said that as recently as 2008 the Conservative government supported processing oil in Canada rather than shipping it to Asia.

In the background material to the proposal, commissioners were told that the British Columbia Native Ministries Council spent considerable time visiting and speaking with church leaders, Aboriginal Elders, and congregation members on the specific issue of the pipeline and its current review by a Joint Review Panel mandated by the federal Minister of the Environment and the National Energy Board of Canada.



Making Connections At Youth Forum

by Thomas Burton

Seventy-five youth, 18 leaders, one loving community. That is what came together at General Council Youth Forum this year.

Young people aged 15 to 20 from presbyteries across the country are exploring their faith and their own church community through Bible study, worship, and self-discovery.

The bond created between the youth in these short days is deep, profound, and valuable. Each member wants to connect with other young people who have experienced faith in a similar way. And this desire to make connections with the church does not stop at Youth Forum. Participants also want to learn about the inner workings of General Council, and Youth Forum provides an excellent opportunity to do this.

During our time at Council Youth Forum participants have met with many United Church leaders. We spoke with 14 people from the national office in a thorough information session, with topics ranging from pastoral health to the Israel/Palestine conflict.

Youth Forum members also had the honour to speak with seven previous Moderators, whose collective terms spanned over 30 years of church life.

These meetings increase the youth's enthusiasm for being involved in General Council.

The youth are also exploring their faith through three streams based on Micah 6:8: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Youth "seek justice" by exploring the church's view on sexuality and gender identity, while trying to break society's restrictive concepts of gender.

Others "love kindness" by exploring peacemaking between different religions and discovering Aboriginal ceremonies and the history of Aboriginal relations with the church.

Youth are exploring the "walking humbly" theme by discussing difficulties faced by refugees and the meaning of humility and visiting the God exhibit at the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa.

The Youth Forum experience is like no other. While singing your heart out, you may find yourself holding hands with a complete stranger or crying with a new friend. There is no better place to reconnect with your faith and community and become educated on issues concerning the church today.



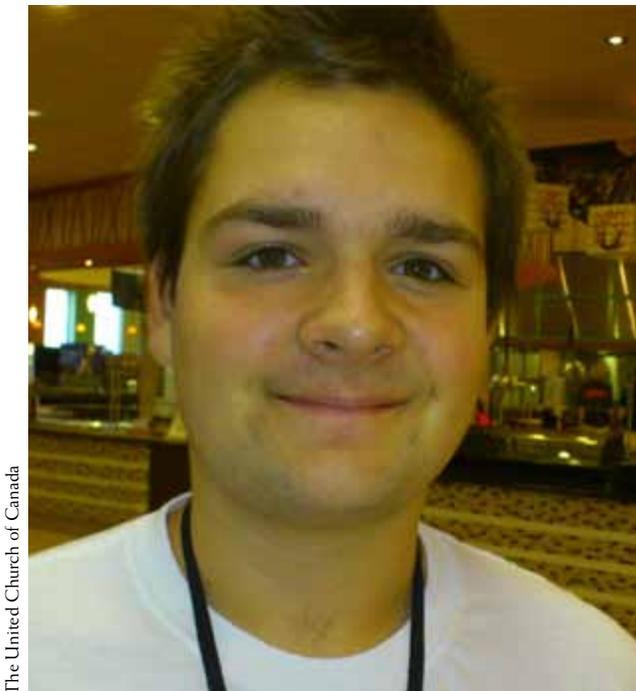
Travaux des commissions

Stéphane Gaudet

Mardi après-midi et en soirée, les 350 délégués au Conseil général se sont divisés en trois commissions pour étudier et voter sur plus de 60 propositions.

Les commissions ont pleine autorité pour adopter, amender ou rejeter les propositions au nom du Conseil général. Pour des raisons pratiques évidentes, l'assemblée plénière ne pourrait pas examiner à elle seule toutes les propositions (près de 130) soumises au Conseil général.

« Vivre avec dignité sur la Terre comme membres d'un même corps », une proposition du Synode Montréal et Ottawa (qui avait préalablement été adoptée et présentée par le Consistoire Laurentien), a fait l'objet d'intenses débats à la commission orange. La proposition appelle le Fonds de pension de l'Église



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Unie à se départir de ses actions de la compagnie minière canadienne Goldcorp Inc. pour ses pratiques en Amérique centrale qui violeraient les droits humains, notamment des populations mayas, et seraient dommageables pour l'environnement. Malgré les préoccupations suscitées par la présence de Goldcorp en Amérique centrale, la commission a décidé, après presque deux heures de discussions, que dans une optique d'investissement responsable, il était d'avantage responsable de garder les actions et d'avoir ainsi une voix à la table des actionnaires que de vendre les actions en laissant la situation en l'état.

Par contre, une autre proposition émanant du Synode Montréal et Ottawa, l'Initiative de Beaconsfield, a été adoptée. La proposition vise à renforcer les partenariats avec les organismes de la région de la Cordillère aux Philippines qui aident les populations indigènes affectées par les projets miniers dans la région.

La commission verte a pour sa part adopté une proposition qui amène l'Église Unie à se joindre au Conseil des ministères autochtones de la Colombie-Britannique dans son opposition au projet de pipeline Northern Gateway de la compagnie Enbridge, projet qui vise à amener le pétrole des sables bitumineux du nord de l'Alberta à la côte du Pacifique. Les délégués se sont montrés préoccupés par le passage du pipeline sur les territoires habités par les peuples autochtones et par les changements que le projet pourrait entraîner dans leur mode de vie et leurs traditions.



Global Partner Works in Christian-Muslim Relations

by Kristine Greenaway

Johnson Mbillah works in what he calls the "turbulent" areas of Africa where relations between Muslims and Christians can be tense.

In his role as the head of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), Mbillah travels from his base in Nairobi, Kenya, to

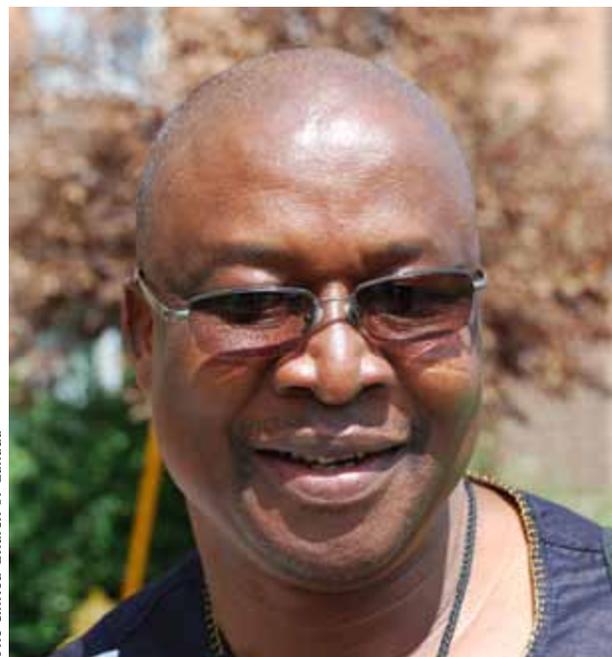
interreligious hot spots such as Nigeria, Sudan, and Egypt. Last week he also travelled to Ottawa, where he is one of seven United Church global partners participating in General Council.

His role in Africa is to provide education to Christian and Muslim religious leaders in constructive engagement. "The idea of constructive engagement is to build community," he explains. "We want to work towards living with our differences in peace, not in pieces."

Mbillah, who holds a doctorate in Islamic studies from the University of Birmingham, UK, says PROCMURA's core business is helping Christians in Africa to work with Muslims for peace and development. The aim is to develop positive interfaith relations at the community level that can serve as a basis for dialogue if trouble arises.

PROCMURA is active in 20 countries throughout Africa, with a particular focus on countries in the sub-Saharan region and on North Africa. Its role is to offer faithful and responsible Christian witness in an interfaith environment of Christians and Muslims. The witness can take the form of joint initiatives in response to HIV and AIDS or in peace-brokering missions in some of the region's violence-torn communities.

The United Church of Canada is a key partner in this work. In Mbillah's words, the church's Mission and Service contribution to PROCMURA's core costs "allows us to survive." Recently, the church provided



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Johnson Mbillah

a one-time contribution to PROCMURA's newly established sustainability fund. The church's support is increasingly vital as other North American donors reduce their funding.

Mbillah's work includes, for example, meeting with Christian and Muslim leaders in South Sudan who gathered on the eve of the first anniversary of the country's independence to discuss issues of mutual concern. It also meant taking part in discussions on peace and development in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, involving the African Union and religious leaders from seven countries.

Mbillah studied theology at Trinity Theological Seminary in Accra, Ghana, and is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. He is currently serving as a member of the United Church's Partners Council, where he says he values the opportunity for global partners to have a voice and offer input to plans for partnership.

"It is important to be here at General Council," says Mbillah. "It means being able to participate in the highest decision-making body of the church to learn and to contribute."



Welcome To *General Council News*

General Council News is being posted daily on The United Church of Canada's 41st General Council website, www.gc41.ca. Individual news stories are being posted throughout the day. Each day a single printed copy will also be delivered to all table groups for commissioners to share. The final edition of *General Council News* will be available online within 24 hours of the closing of General Council on Saturday, August 18.

General Council News reporters will be covering the highlights and significant happenings of the 41st General Council, rather than recording everything that happens each day. All *General Council News* stories may be reproduced freely.

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