

Three resolutions passed by the Diocese of Vermont on November 4th, 2021, during the annual convention of Episcopal churches in Vermont.

On November 4th, 2021, during its annual convention attended by delegates from Episcopal churches in Vermont and a few from New York, the Diocese of Vermont passed three resolutions similar to the resolution debated by the Burlington City Council: to put pressure on Israel to end apartheid and its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories. Two of the three resolutions had already been passed at the 2018 Convention; but were not sent for presentation at the national-level Episcopal General Convention. This year's Vermont Diocesan convention was an opportunity to request that the two resolutions passed in 2018 (described in the next paragraph) be sent to the national-level (General) Convention that will convene in 2022 in Baltimore.

The two resolutions passed at the 2018 Vermont Convention are as follows.

1. Supporting Freedom of Speech and the Right to Boycott

Resolved, that the 185th Convention of the Diocese of Vermont urge the President of the United States and the Vermont congressional delegation to oppose legislation that would penalize companies and organizations for their participation in nonviolent boycotts on behalf of Palestinian human rights, as such legislation, at both federal and state levels, would be an infringement on First Amendment rights.

2. Application of the Leahy Laws to Israel

Resolved, that the 185th Convention of the Diocese of Vermont request the Office of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church and the Vermont congressional delegation to urge the United States Departments of State and Defense to apply the Leahy Laws to Israel. (*The Leahy Laws, or Leahy Amendments, are U.S. human rights laws that prohibit the U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense from providing military assistance to foreign security force units that engage in "gross violations of human rights."*)

The third resolution, which addresses Apartheid, failed to pass at the Vermont Diocesan Convention in 2018. It was rewritten and resubmitted this year (2021) with a new title. After a lively discussion, the following Resolution passed in 2021 by a large margin -- 85 to 17.

3. Recognition of Apartheid in Israel

RESOLVED, the House of _____ concurring, That the 80th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, acknowledging our continuing struggle in the United States to achieve racial equality, recognize that the State of Israel has passed laws that discriminate against its non-Jewish citizens, particularly Palestinians, and that its military occupation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank and blockade of Gaza impose prejudicial treatment of Palestinians and privilege Israeli settlers, contravening international law and human rights; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the General Convention recognize that these discriminatory laws and treatment correspond to the definitions of apartheid elaborated in the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid and set out in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.¹

According to the Palestine Israel Network bulletin of Nov. 25th, 2021 “The third of the Vermont resolutions, *Recognition of Apartheid in Israel/Palestine*, was a landmark achievement, marking the first time that any entity within the Episcopal Church named Israel policy toward Palestinians **apartheid**.”

Building on the landmark achievement in Vermont, the Diocese of Chicago passed a similar resolution on Nov. 20th *Confronting Apartheid* (in Israel/Palestine) that passed with 72% in favor and 28% opposed.

To explain what happened between 2018, when a resolution on apartheid similar to Number 3 above was rejected; and 2021, when an overwhelming majority of Vermont delegates adopted the resolution accusing the Israeli government of the crime of Apartheid, we can point to three major events.

1. In 2021, in a detailed 213-page report *A Threshold Crossed: Israel Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, Human Rights Watch examined Israel’s treatment of Palestinians and the present-day reality of a single authority, the Israeli government that governs the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The area is populated by two groups of roughly equal size, namely, Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. The report found that the Israeli government methodically privileges Jewish Israelis while it represses Palestinians, and does so most severely in the occupied territories.
2. Also in 2021, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights (B’Tselem) declared: *The Israeli Regime enacts in all the territory it controls (Israeli sovereign territory,*

¹ The crime of apartheid is defined by the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court as inhumane acts of a character similar to other crimes against humanity "committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime". Cited on [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid_\(crime\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid_(crime))

East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip) an apartheid regime. One organizing principle lies at the base of a wide array of Israeli policies: advancing and perpetuating the supremacy of one group - Jews - over another - Palestinians.

3. In July 2021, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ overwhelmingly condemned Israeli Apartheid, becoming the first mainstream denomination to use the term (see <https://www.ucc.org/synod-delegates-approve-resolution-decrying-oppression-of-palestinian-people/>). The action was likened to the stand the UCC took against South African apartheid in 1989. Israel's Apartheid was termed a sin against God and God's children. The extensive complicity of the U.S. government in supporting Israel's oppression of the Palestinians was identified as a further reason that American churches are called to speak out.