

Proposed Strategy for UNJPPI on Encouraging BDS among Their Constituencies

Background

The UNJPPI CT committee met with the external consultant to discuss the rationale and need for this strategy. They met a few times from July to December 2022, and this draft is based on these conversations. This strategy aims to get more United Church of Canada (UCC) members excited and engaged in boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) on a local level as a peaceful means to achieve peace and justice for Israelis and Palestinians. The UNJPPI team has voiced their concern over the postponement of all their constituencies' proposals pending the implementation of GCE04.¹ Although this strategy is not directly responding to the General Council decision, however, the postponement reflects a need to further engage and raise awareness of UCC members on BDS.

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¹ GC GC44 Decision Session 9, streamed via Youtube, July 25th, minute 13:00 to 31:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBH6V2qfPXI&list=PLQDu-SgFb3RgnfAE-HUiSIM3VJMAqoc6d&index=18&t=1930s>

Strategy Description

Goal:

Increase United Church of Canada members' awareness around BDS and to take action locally

Objective 1: Educate and raise awareness about the Palestinian context

Target Audience:

- UCC members who are passionate about social justice, and
- Not familiar with the Israeli-Palestinian context

Identify clearly the needs, concerns and fears of UCC members and the challenges they face to advocate for Palestinian rights

Output 1.1

Hold entry-level events where personal witness accounts and experiences are shared about the Palestinian context (micro level).

The rationale behind this objective is to allow and create entry points for UCC members unfamiliar with Palestinian experiences. People unfamiliar with the Palestinian context will not be able to engage in BDS. Therefore, this objective bears in mind that people need to interact on a micro level through storytelling and personal connections to start their learning experience about the Israeli-Palestinian context. This output is the time for UCC members to re-humanize Palestinians either with Palestinians or their allies (OBJ 1.1).

Output 1.2

Follow up with deeper discussions/workshops on the root causes of Palestinian injustice (macro level).

When you feel that your group is ready to dive into the systematic causes that are perpetuating Palestinian experiences of injustice (OBJ1.2), engage in conversations, whether independently or in collaboration with UNJPPI's allies, on the apartheid Israeli system that affects Palestinian day-to-day life, such as ongoing land confiscations, various legal statuses and citizenship to Palestinian based on their geographic locations, access to health care, etc. Alternatively, you can talk about these issues in terms of the imbalance of power and how it manifests in the economic, cultural, political, judicial, health and religious sectors of Palestinian life.

Output 1.3

Engage with local Jewish and Palestinian advocacy groups in your area that share your vision.

If you feel that you need to bring in allies in your area who can help further educate and raise awareness about the Palestinian context (OBJ 1.3), UNJPPI provides a list of recommended groups you can invite to your community in the resources section below. It is recommended to start cultivating these relationships early on in order to strengthen the relationship for the next objectives

Objective 2: Educate and raise awareness on boycott and divestment

Target Audience:

- UCC members are passionate about social justice, and
- Well familiar with the Israeli-Palestinian context, and
- Not yet ready to take action on BDS

Identify clearly the needs, concerns and fears of UCC members and the challenges they face to advocate for Palestinian rights and BDS

Output 2.1

Initiate and conduct entry level discussions/workshops on BDS.

Objective 2 focuses on creating and maintaining a learning environment where members can reach their conclusions about BDS. Therefore, start with a general discussion on unpacking what BDS means (OBJ 2.1). According to the BDS movement, “Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) is a Palestinian-led movement for freedom, justice and equality. BDS upholds the simple principle that Palestinians are entitled to the same rights as the rest of humanity.” It is important to establish early on connections with other BDS groups in your region, which you could then invite at this stage.

Output 2.2

Study and discern your commitment to BDS.

The next step is to delve into the reasons for BDS. BDS is a legitimate form of non-violent resistance, as David Willman states in his [letter](#) on “BDS as Nonviolence, loving Actions.” As an act of solidarity with our Palestinian brothers and sisters, we join their pursuit of justice as mentioned in the Kairos Palestine [letter](#) to church leaders and the “Cry for Hope: A Call to Decisive Action” [letter](#). BDS serves to elevate Canadian civil society’s views which are disconnected from Canadian foreign policy, according to the [2020 IKOS survey](#). And finally, engage with the UCC’s legacy and engagement in ending the South African Apartheid as a live case study. (OBJ2.2)

Output 2.3

Engage in discussions on the challenges to BDS.

Here is a list of the challenges that have been associated with BDS (OBJ2.3):

- + Fear of being labelled as Antisemitic/Anti-Semitic
- + Harmful impact on Jewish-Christian Dialogue
- + An enhanced sense of powerlessness due to the intractability of the conflict
- + An enhanced sense of hopelessness due to the growing imbalance of power
- + Politicization and polarization around BDS language

Objective 3: Engage in boycott and divestment on a local level

Target Audience:

- UCC members are passionate about social justice, and
- Well familiar with the Israeli-Palestinian context, and
- Ready to engage locally on BDS

Identify clearly the needs, concerns and fears of UCC members and the challenges they face to advocate for Palestinian rights and BDS

Output 3.1

Identify your proximity to economic investments that harm Palestinian

When there is a readiness to engage in BDS, the first step is to weigh the extent of divestments needed in-house, whether personal or congregational. By identifying the scope of divestment (problem), you also determine the steps necessary to counter it (solution) economically and relationally, whether to the financial institution, congregation members/leaders or others. Similarly, important to divesting in identified companies/shares is the communication to all stakeholders about BDS.

Output 3.2

Identify your proximity to products that harm Palestinians

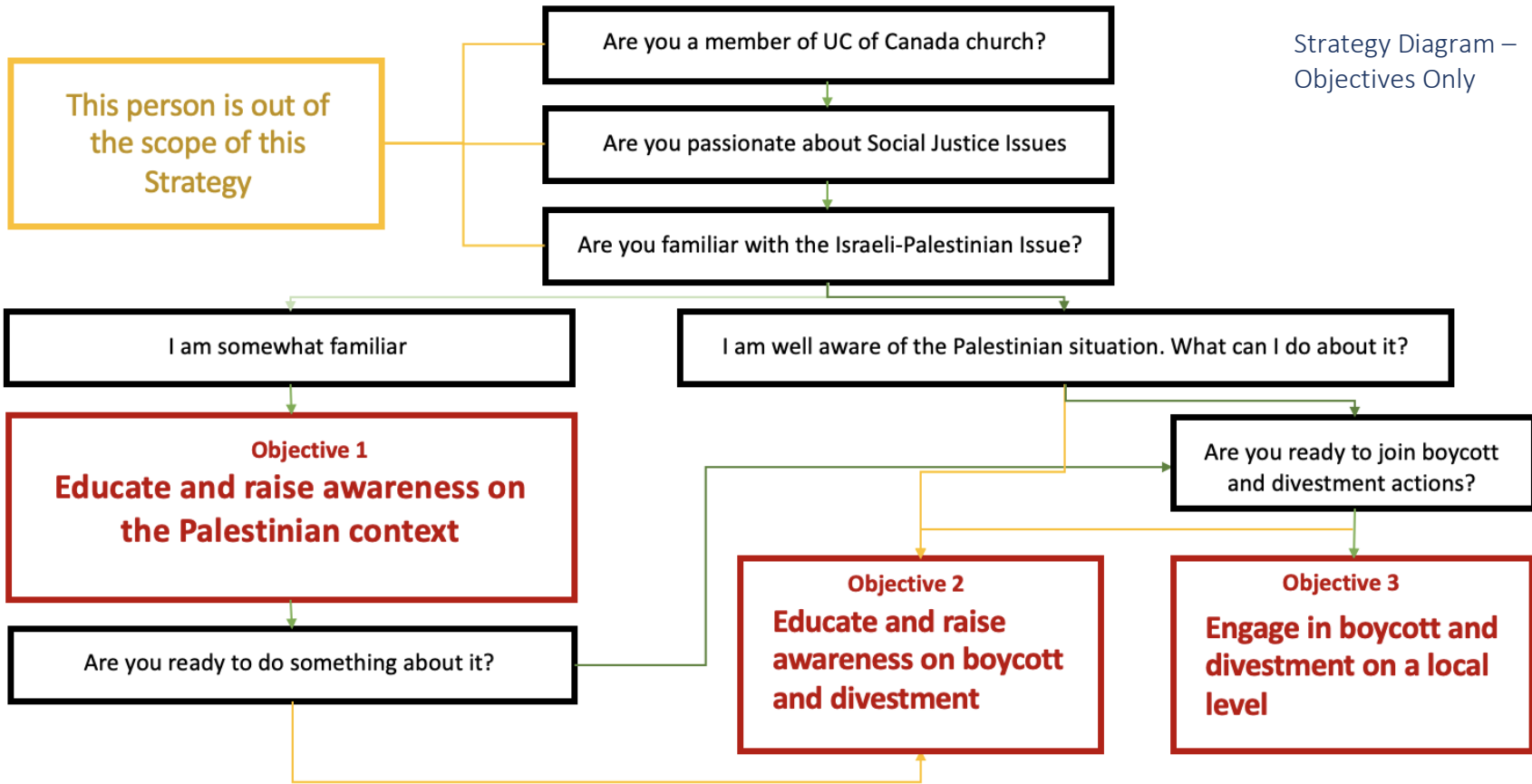
In a similar way to OBJ 3.1, this step looks at the commercial products purchased in-house, be it personal or congregational. Once products are identified, an alternative product that offers the same, or close enough, service/product needs to be researched.

Output 3.3

Take appropriate measures to boycott and divestment within your influence

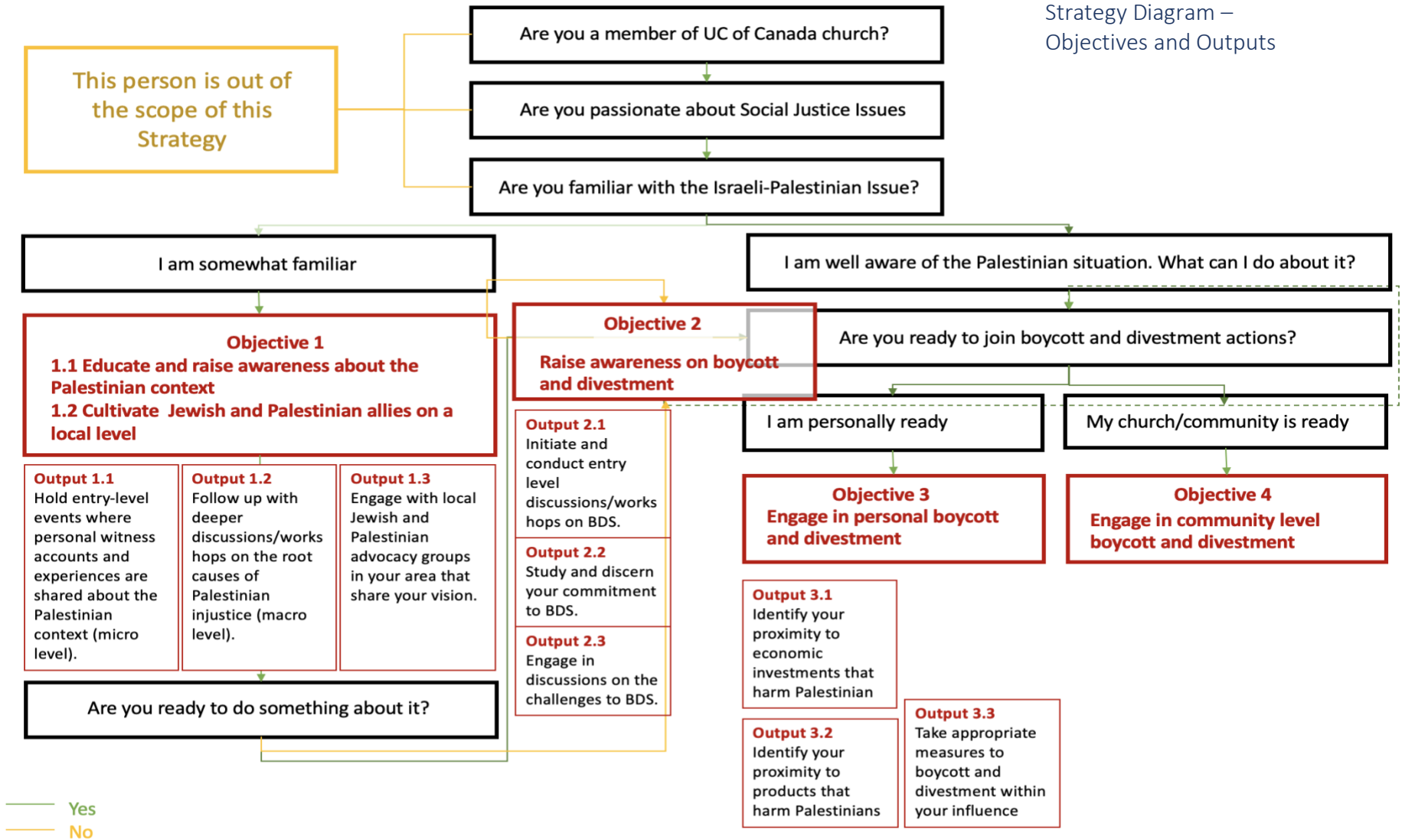
Once the companies/shares/products are identified and ensuring there are alternative companies/shares/products available, you need to plan the scope and level of communication of your choices. Some churches prefer to make a statement, while others prefer to keep this decision internally known only. In your plan, you should consider the risks and opportunities of going public. It is advisable to consult with the UNJPPI team in your area or nationally to help your decision-making.

Strategy Diagram – Objectives Only



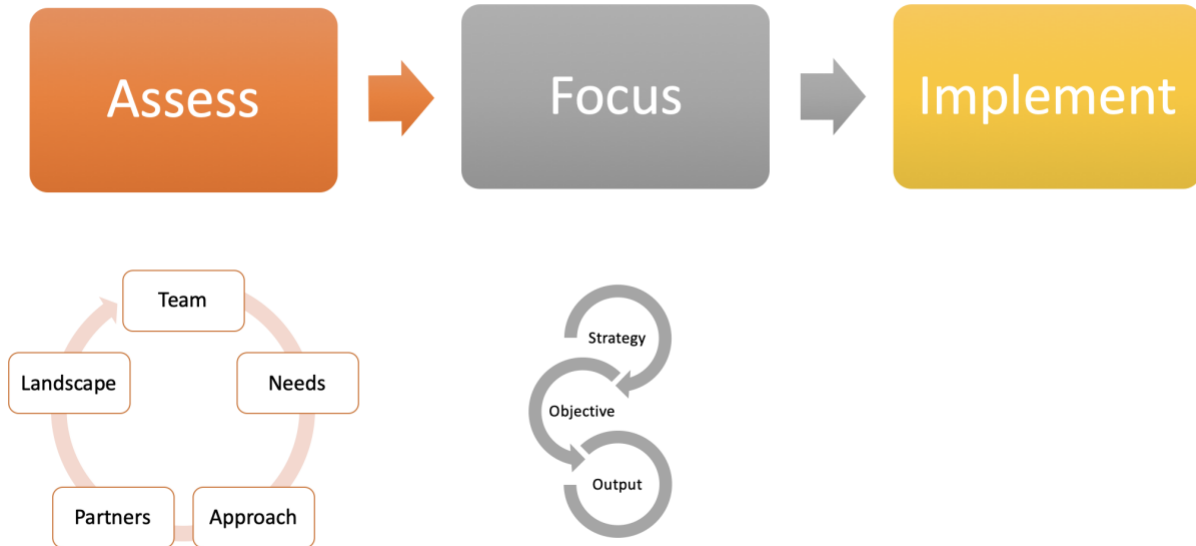
— Yes
— No

Strategy Diagram – Objectives and Outputs



Action Plan – Best Practices

Here is a suggestion on how to go about to implement this strategy in your community.



We recommend that before implementing any programs, you need to assess your context in order to choose an objective from the strategy.

Assessment – here are some guiding questions to consider

Team – who can you work with in your church community to make this happen?

Needs – what does your team need in order to make this happen?

Approach – how or who are you going to approach for your plan? See [Action Plan – Approach Considerations](#).

Partners – Do you have existing partnerships, outside your church, with allies who can join your plan? This is crucial to ask at the beginning because as you progress in this strategy, you should consider collaborating with Jewish partners. Furthermore, having partners might impact whether your event will be specific to a church or open to the public.

Landscape – what is the political, economic, social, religious context in your target area? Which of these elements empowers and which can be an obstacle to your plan?

Once you have assessed your context, you are able to determine your capacity. Consequently, we encourage you to **focus** on one target audience you wish to work with in the Strategy.

If you have some people who are **well familiar** with Palestine, and ready to engage in BDS while at the same time you have people who **are not familiar** with Palestine, it will

be challenging to navigate a program that accommodates both groups. Your team should discern the best plan of action.

For example, if you have enough capacity to accommodate both groups, then you can decide to simultaneously conduct two separate programs for each group (two objectives). But if you do not have capacity, then it might be best to focus on one group (one objective).

If you do not know the level of familiarity your target audience has on Palestine, then perhaps consider doing an entry-level event as part of your assessment phase.

Once you have decided on your objective, please consider setting a clear start and end date for your implementation plan.

We have also compiled the following resources for best practices to help in your planning

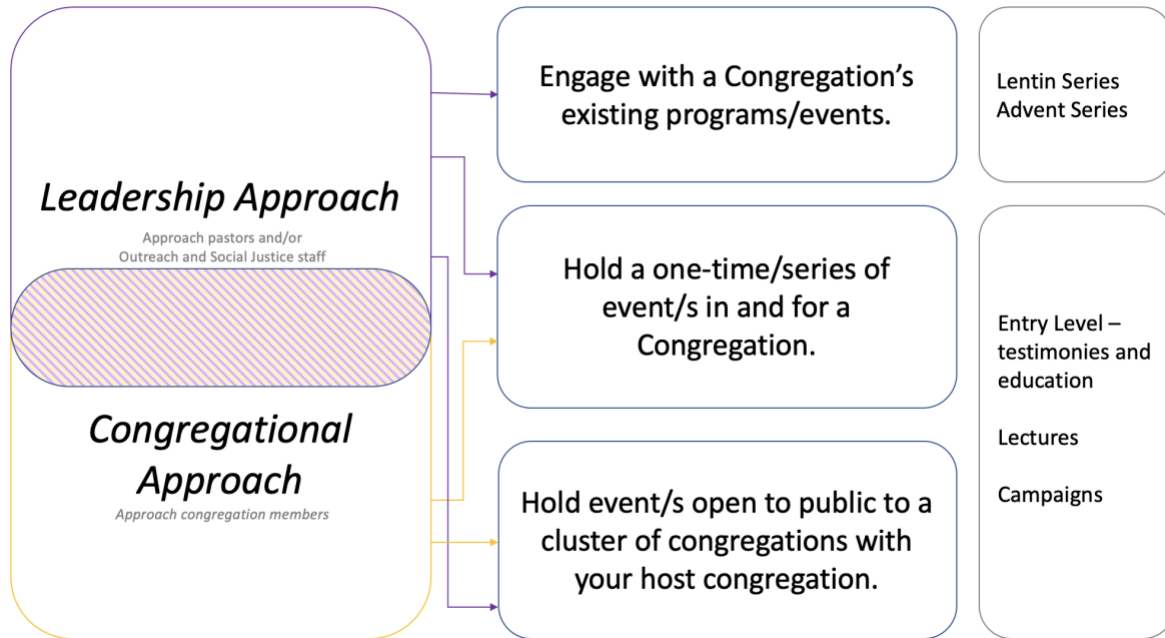
[Action Plan – Suggested List of Speakers per outputs](#). If you would like to invite speakers on a specific topic or issue, here is a template that will help you compile a list of potential speakers.

[Action Plan – Resources per Outputs](#). There are ample of materials on Israel/Palestine, and this list offers some materials that UNJPPI team consider reliable.

[Action Plan – Best Practices regarding Antisemitism](#)

Action Plan - Approach Considerations

Action Plan - A - Target Approach



Before implementation, we suggest that you consider who do you want to approach in a congregation. From previous experiences, three approaches were identified: working with church leadership, working with members of a church or with a combination of both. Here are some advantages (+) and disadvantages (-) with either approach:

- + **Leadership approach** would contribute to existing programs in a congregation. This way, you are helping the leadership to implement their own programs.
- + In addition, this approach might reduce the leadership's sense of anxieties to talk about Palestine issue, especially from negative backlash.
- + Strategically, the leadership approach is more efficient in the long term, especially when we get to objectives 2 and 3.
- + **The Congregational Approach** might be more suited in congregations where the leadership refuses to talk about Palestine/Israel.
- **Leadership Approach** – Might limit/sensor the depth of the conversation in order not to jeopardize their interfaith partners/activities.

Action Plan – Suggested Speakers per Outputs

Name	Contact Information /Email	Location /Region	Areas of Expertise	Level of Familiarity with Palestine context	Best for Output
Name 1	Email	Vancouver Shinning Waters Group	Theological – Christian Zionism, Social Justice, Theology of Land.	EAPPI 2018 – went to Hebron for 3 months	1.1 2.1
Name 2	Email	Toronto Group Name	Human Rights	CPT 2009	2.2 1.3
Name 3	Email		Personal testimony	Palestinian refugee from Gaza who moved to Canada in 2014	1.1
Name 4	Email	Independent Jewish Voice local representative	Antisemitism, Israeli law inside the green line.	Has been to Palestine with IJV groups	1.3

Action Plan - Resources per Output
Available Resources to Use for Objective 1

	UNJPPI/UCC Resources	Other
Output 1.1	See Annex 1B – Contact List	
Output 1.2	Israel as an Apartheid State – UNJPPI Resources .	Seek Peace, Pursue Justice in Israel-Palestine: Time for Action video . Interconnection between American and Israeli Settler-Colonialism systems
Output 1.3	Groups who work alongside the UCC to seek a just peace for Palestine/Israel (website) More groups who work alongside the UCC to seek a just peace for Palestine/Israel (Resource list)	
Output 2.1	UNJPPI’s BDS policy or mandate UCC unsettling Good Policy	Independent Jewish Voice’s introduction of the BDS movement page .
Output 2.2	<i>In Good Faith: Canadian Churches Against Apartheid</i> , Renate Pratt, 1997.	
Output 2.3		Independent Jewish Voices Canada material on Antisemitism Kairos Challenges to BDS page. BDS Toolkit Challenges page .
Output 3.1		Know what to boycott here Investigate search engine Who profits from the occupation page .
Output 3.2	Positive Direct Support – such as Zatoun	Know what to boycott here BDS movement economic boycott page
Output 3.3		Consider joining Apartheid Free Zone here

Action Plan – Best Practices regarding Antisemitism

This needs to be further elaborated and contextualized to your needs. However, these are only introductory points for a best practice.

Get in front of the church on the definition of Anti-Semitism

We propose inviting an IJV or a B'tselem representative, who has studied the Jerusalem definition of Anti-Semitism, to talk about it. Definitions have been politicized and weaponized. We need to discern the importance of these definitions on the reality of antisemitism, and how to defuse claims that say sanctioning Israel is antisemitism. We recommend to ensure such conversation is Jewish led, because that will be the main block raised against your advocacy. Talk to your partners about this

On the claim that UCC adopting BDS would harm its Jewish-Christian relations.

We propose inviting Canadian voices like Jewish Voices for Peace or your local Jewish partners that say that our dialogue is not affected by UCC campaign on Israel but has rather helped and promoted the issue so that more people stand for that. Bring resources and assistance that will give congregations some confidence. What was shared in the GC that 95% of Jewish people in Canada support the state of Israel is much more nuanced than what the statement says. Try to find voices to speak to that.