

Affirming Our First Amendment Right to Boycott

A Statement by the Social Justice Committee
of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Rockville, Maryland

December 5, 2017

As Unitarian Universalists, we affirm the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large. As Americans, we are aware that the First Amendment squarely protects the right to boycott. Lately, a legislative assault on these values and rights has been spreading through the United States. For example, in Maryland:

- * Gov. Larry Hogan signed an executive order in October 2017 that prohibits the state from doing business with companies engaged in a boycott of Israel.
- * U.S. Senator Ben Cardin authored a bill (S 720) that would make it a felony for Americans to support the international boycott against Israel, which was launched in protest of that country's decades-old occupation of Palestine.

The bills and laws, in at least 20 states as well as the U.S. Senate, vary in numerous respects, but they share a common goal of scaring people away from participating in protests against Israeli government policies, including protests known as Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns. Regardless of what one thinks of the merits of this particular boycott, these attacks on our First Amendment right to boycott are unconstitutional and cannot be tolerated.

In a landmark 1982 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that an NAACP boycott of white-owned businesses in Mississippi (a boycott to protest segregation and racial injustice) was a protected form of free association and free expression. As the court recognized, political boycotts empower individuals to collectively express their dissatisfaction with the status quo and advocate for political, social, and economic change. These are precisely the freedoms the Constitution is meant to protect.

We call upon Senator Cardin and Governor Hogan to rescind their respective actions.

** ***** **