Lansing Coalition Targets Israel Bonds

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For Palestine solidarity organizations, the call to work for divestment from Israel and Israeli institutions complicit in apartheid, genocide and ethnic cleansing involves working with broader coalitions and digging into the opaque bureaucratic processes through which decisions are made. Work by activists in Michigan provides insights.

The Palestine Interfaith Network (PIN), a coalition that formed in response to genocide in Gaza and includes members from multiple Christian denominations including members East Lansing Edgewood UCC and Quaker Friends, Muslim, Buddhists and individual Jewish participants, has been actively working with a broader coalition of activists in Michigan to force the state of Michigan to divest from its investments in Israel. The coalition includes Michigan Divest, a statewide activist organization committed to divestment, among others.

The divestment campaign began with the discovery that the Michigan State Employee Pension System held a $10 million Israel bond as part of the employee pension portfolio. The campaign organizers noted that the Pension Board sold a Russia Bond at the request of the Governor when Russia invaded Ukraine. More than a year of activism that involved significant mobilizing of volunteers including teachers and other state employees to communicate concern about the moral implications of holding and support for divestment from the Israel bond in public meetings and other communication including emails to the State Pension Board. The campaign successfully led to a decision not to renew the bond in November 2025, a significant victory.

This victory was dampened, however, by the revelation that the Michigan State Parks Endowment, which has a much less public process of decision-making, purchased a $7 million Israel bond last year. Activists are working to find a mechanism to oppose this.

Simultaneously, the coalition has begun targeting funding by the Michigan state legislature and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) to the Michigan Israel Business Accelerator (MIBA), an organization established to facilitate business partnerships between Israeli firms and commercial interests in the state of Michigan. The MEDC is a state institution established to facilitate economic development and business activities in Michigan. MIBA has already facilitated the opening of Israeli military and technology firms in Michigan. This past year, MIBA requested a $1 million grant in the Michigan budget as one of more than 1000 “Legislatively Directed Spending Items” (LDSIs). LDSIs (basically earmarks), are awarded due to requests of a legislator, in this case one from Macomb County just outside Detroit, which has become a hub for Israeli military-

industrial technology firms in the state, and a conservative legislator from west Michigan. PIN collaborated with the MI Money Out of Michigan campaign (MMOM), which mobilized more than 240 letters to the Michigan House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor and Economic Operations and meetings with some key legislators. The earmark for MIBA was not included in the budget appropriations bill. Collaborating organizations in MMOM include US Palestinian Community Network, Detroit Chapter. Jewish Voice or Peace, Detroit Chapter, and Engineers Against Apartheid, along with Michigan Divest. A PIN member is on the Steering Committee of both Michigan Divest and MMOM.

On discovery that MEDC has given grants to MIBA of $6 million since 2018 PIN, Michigan Divest and other coalition partners mounted a pressure campaign to cancel the grant for 2026 and decline to make any grants in future years.

Freedom of Information Act documents show that MIBA, for its part, has hired lobbying and public relations firms to try to mitigate damage from campaign activities – both in the Michigan legislature and the MEDC.

While PIN, in coalition with other Palestine solidarity groups, has not necessarily succeeded in divestment of Michigan taxpayer dollars, it has succeeded in bringing such funding out of the shadows, shining a light on millions in funding to Israel and Israeli firms that might have received little attention a few years ago. This is exemplified by an article in the Detroit News recently where the MIBA CEO had to defend MIBA investments and complain about the coalition's efforts. The campaign has at least succeeded in creating public discussion around investments to Israel and Israeli firms that had in previous years happened with little public scrutiny.

PIN's involvement in the coalition for divestment from funding Israel's genocide and ethnic cleansing is instructive for the national faith-based campaigns seeking to live out the calls from Palestinian Christians for costly solidarity and support nonviolent campaigns including Boycott Divestment and Sanctions in Kairos Palestine II. First, one should presume that, as in Michigan, states across the United States have existing investments in Israel and Israel's war machine. Faith-based coalitions can play a key role in combatting this insidious development through working in partnership with secular Palestinian solidarity movements. Second, attacking this level of state investment involves delving into the details of often opaque financing institutions and processes, knowing that part of the strategy of pro-Israel forces has been to infiltrate these institutions to create funding streams and partnerships that make opposition to Israel and its actions difficult to oppose. Lastly, recognize that success will be a moving target, but some is tied to making public decisions about funding that have been previously made behind closed doors.