

Ethical Investment Policy Statement 2010

Mission Council meeting in London Colney in March 2010 received a report on ethical investment principles for the use by the United Reformed Church. These principles are based on theological reflection on how to express mission responsibility through investment and developments in ethical investment policy and practice to reflect both positive and negative screening criteria based on social, environmental, governance and ethical concerns. General Assembly 2010 adopted these principles.

Ethical investment principles for use by the United Reformed Church

1 The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church considers investment decisions to be an integral part of the Church's mission and witness and is committed, as far as it is legal and practical, to expressing Christian responsibility through investment decisions. Towards this end, Assembly requests that those responsible for investment decisions on behalf of the URC and its Trust bodies are guided by the principles set out below.

2 Assembly wishes the basic, aspirational ethical principles outlined below to inform all investment decisions:

- mission integrity - the URC will, in all investment related activities, aim to avoid undermining the credibility, effectiveness and unity of its mission and witness;
- stewardship - those entrusted with responsibility for investment decisions on behalf of the URC, its Trust bodies and their agents will exercise due diligence and care in the exercise of their duty to ensure that mission and fiduciary responsibilities are creatively and effectively balanced;
- legality - all investment decisions will comply with the legal requirements for trustees as outlined in the Charity Acts and other legislation;
- sustainability - investment decisions will be guided by the principle of financial and environmental sustainability with a view to the long term maintenance of well-being for the economic, social and natural environments;
- solidarity - investment decisions will be guided by the biblical principle of solidarity with those who are poor and marginalised and seek social justice as expressed in Statement 9 of the URC's Mission framework;¹
- accountability - URC trustees, working in liaison with fund managers, will aspire to the highest level of compliance with this policy which can be achieved;
- transparency - reputational risk will be minimised by ensuring openness and transparency in reporting on URC investment portfolios and compliance with this policy;
- partnership - the URC recognises the value of collaborative action in terms of effecting change in companies' policies and practices and commits to working with the other members of the Church Investors Group (CIG), the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) and other ecumenical agencies to engage with companies and, where relevant, to act in support of their initiatives.

3 Expression will be given to these principles through both negative and positive screening of companies as well as through selective direct engagement with companies. Each of these investment strategies is outlined below and should be considered as part of an integral approach to ethical investment by the URC.

4 The existing URC Ethical Investment policy will be developed to guide our investments in terms of negative screening. This policy states:

General Assembly recommends that trustees and all those with investment responsibilities connected with the United Reformed Church should avoid any investment in:

- a) companies directly engaged in the manufacture or supply of weapons of destruction;
- b) companies a significant part of whose business is in the supply of alcoholic drinks or tobacco products or military equipment (other than weapons of destruction); or the provision of gambling facilities; or the publication or distribution of pornography.

General Assembly notes that the definition of these activities, or of what constitutes a significant part of a company's business, requires judgement and the Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) of Mission Council is available to offer advice. In general, EIAG will deem 'significant' to mean where the share of turnover derived from the activity concerned is more than around 10-20% of the company's total turnover.

General Assembly recognises that this policy can only be advisory as the responsibility of specific investment decisions remains with each body of trustees.

However, in addition to the criteria listed above, the URC's investment bodies are encouraged to avoid investment in companies whose management practices are deemed to be unacceptable or whose operations are deemed to:

- contribute to the oppressive nature of regimes which are guilty of gross human rights violations;
- contribute to a harmful impact on the social or natural environment;
- harm the society in which they operate more than they benefit it;
- promote injustice.

5 Positive screening and 'best in class/sector' strategy - URC trustees are encouraged to support companies that seek to develop their businesses successfully and sustainably in the long term interests of shareholders and other stakeholders. The URC will seek to invest in companies which have an active commitment to the following:

- responsible employment practices;
- equal opportunities policy and practice;
- good practice in terms of corporate governance;
- environmental sustainability expressed by comprehensive environmental and climate change policies and audits;
- positive attitudes to customers and active monitoring of employment practices across the supply chain;
- openness in reporting to stakeholders;
- sensitivity towards communities in which they operate;
- integrity in all their dealings; and
- the promotion of human rights, especially in countries with oppressive regimes.

6 Engagement and dialogue with companies - the URC endorses the strategy of direct engagement with companies through correspondence, face-to-face meetings and shareholders' attendance at AGMs as a means of influencing the practices of these companies. This is based on an understanding of the theological and moral duty to monitor the policies and practices of companies in which a URC body is a direct shareholder and to raise concerns with a company if we are not fully satisfied with its business.

7 Project or socially-directed investment - in addition to the positive screening, the URC will continue to set aside a proportion of its capital for investment where the return is principally social rather than financial. This echoes the Church's mission strategy.² The following social investments have considerable overlap with ethical investment portfolios and may sometimes offer market rate investments:

- community land and reinvestment trusts;
- ecological building projects;
- organic food and fair trade initiatives; and
- micro-credit based social development programmes.

In supporting any such initiative, URC Trust bodies should be satisfied that effective governance monitoring is in place.³

8 Disinvestment - as a last resort, the URC will consider selling its shares in a company on ethical grounds in cases where a company fails to amend its operating policies and practices after engagement and dialogue over an extended period of time. Such action will generally be taken in conjunction with ecumenical partners through the CIG (or similar body) based on advice from the EIAG. However, such decisions will be subject to periodic review in the light of these principles to maintain the integrity and credibility of the policy.

9 Monitoring of policy - The monitoring of these principles on behalf of the URC is principally the task of Mission Council's Ethical Investment Advisory Group. EIAG is required to report on issues of concern and develop policy statements on various issues related to ethical investment as necessary. However, every investment body and officer within the URC family (whether at assembly, synod or local church level) needs to share in this responsibility to ensure the Church retains its mission integrity.

¹ See p.22 of the *Vision 2020 – planning for growth in the URC* booklet for details - http://www.unc.org.uk/what_we_do/mission/images/vision2020_booklet_colour.pdf

² See *Vision 2020 – planning for growth in the URC* at http://www.unc.org.uk/what_we_do/mission/images/vision2020_booklet_colour.pdf

³ Cited in EIRIS/UKSIF Charity Project, *Responsible Investment Approaches to Non-Equity Investments: An Introduction for Charity Trustees*, 2006, www.charityysri.org

General Assembly welcomes the statement 'Ethical investment principles for the use of the United Reformed Church' for the guidance of those responsible for making investment decisions and commends the summary statement 'Recommended Mandate for Investors' . July 2010

Summary Statement - Recommended Mandate for Investors

1) General Assembly recommends that trustees and all those with investment responsibilities connected with the United Reformed Church should avoid any investment in:

- a) Companies directly engaged in the manufacture or supply of weapons;
- b) Companies a significant part of whose business is in the manufacture or supply of alcoholic drinks, or tobacco products, or military equipment (other than weapons); or the provision of gambling facilities; or the publication or distribution of pornography.

General Assembly is of the view that in the definition of the activities outlined in b), 'significant' means that the share of turnover derived from the activity concerned is more than 10% of the company's total turnover.

2) In addition to the exclusions listed above, the URC's investment bodies should reserve the right to avoid investment in companies whose operations are deemed to:

- contribute directly to human rights violations or support the maintenance of oppressive regimes who are guilty of gross human rights violations;
- contribute to a systematic, harmful impact on the social or natural environment;
- harm the society in which they operate more than they benefit it;
- promote injustice.

3) Further it is expected that governance standards of our advisers, our fund managers, their agents, and the companies in which we invest, both directly and indirectly, should meet internationally accepted norms. By focusing on these standards, investors will favour companies which will be seeking to develop their businesses sustainably in the long term interests of their shareholders and other stakeholders.

4) General Assembly recognises that this policy cannot be binding upon those with responsibility for specific investment decisions but when these bodies seek advice on investment matters they should apply due diligence to ensure that the integrity and reputation of the United Reformed Church is, as far as is practical, protected.