

BOYCOTT DIVESTMENT SANCTIONS

The non-violent response to Israeli apartheid and occupation

'I've been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa. I have seen the humiliation of the Palestinians at checkpoints and roadblocks, suffering like us when young white police officers prevented us from moving about.'

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Why boycott?

- For decades Israel has been destroying Palestinian lives, homes and livelihoods. It continues to build illegal settlements in the West Bank, stealing precious water resources and setting up hundreds of checkpoints to stop Palestinians getting to work, school or hospital.
- Israel has almost completed an eight-metre high Apartheid Wall which snakes through the West Bank, isolating many Palestinian centres of population, including the holy city of Bethlehem. It also annexes the fertile land of the Jordan Valley.
- In East Jerusalem Israel is carrying out a policy of ethnic cleansing; Palestinians whose families have lived there for centuries are being evicted from their homes, which are then destroyed or occupied by settlers.
- Since 2006 the Gaza Strip has been under brutal siege; even basic necessities are denied entry. In the winter of 2008–2009, 1400 Palestinians including more than 300 children were killed in three weeks of bombing and shelling by land, sea and air.
- In Israel itself the indigenous Palestinians are treated as second class citizens, and no refugees have been allowed to return to their homes.

All these actions fly in the face of international law. The Fourth Geneva Convention, to which Israel is a signatory, is being violated on a daily basis. The International Court of Justice and dozens of UN resolutions have called for immediate action to put a

stop to Israel's illegal activities — **yet not a single government has taken any action.**

A shameful silence

Even following Israel's war crimes in Gaza, and the EU's endorsement of the Goldstone Report, there has been no move by western governments to curb Israel's actions in any way. When he came to power, President Obama called for a halt on settlement building — but fell silent when Israel continued to announce expansions.

Israel feels it has impunity — for decades it has violated international humanitarian law and UN resolutions. As our government won't apply pressure on Israel, this seeming paralysis at government level means it is up to ordinary citizens to act.

Our role

PSC formally launched the BDS campaign in the UK at a House of Commons meeting in September, 2001. Since then we have entered into a dialogue with supermarkets that stock Israeli goods, and with organisations and institutions that promote cultural, sporting and academic relations with Israel. We seek to explain the current legal and political situation to them. We also campaign within trade unions and church groups and lobby parliament on these issues. PSC branches have made the BDS campaign central to their work in communities around the UK. As one member said: "This is an excellent way to open up a discussion with the general public. You start with imported avocados and end up with the Fourth Geneva Convention!"



Local activities vary from leafleting supermarkets to challenging the promotion of Israel's economy, sport and culture in the UK.

Palestinians call for boycott

In 2005 over 170 organisations, fully representative of Palestinian civil society, called upon international organisations and people of conscience all over the world **“to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era”**, until Israel complies with international law.

The BDS National Committee in Palestine (www.bdsmovement.net) has since been coordinating the BDS campaign around the world.

In 2008 the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (www.pacbi.org) called upon colleagues in the international community to **“comprehensively and consistently boycott all Israeli academic and cultural institutions as a contribution to the struggle to end Israel's occupation, colonisation and system of apartheid”**, on the grounds that “Israeli academic institutions (mostly state controlled) and the vast majority of Israeli intellectuals and academics have either contributed directly to maintaining, defending or otherwise justifying the above forms of oppression, or have been complicit in them through their silence”.

Increasingly, academics, artists, writers and musicians around the world have brought pressure to bear in their own fields of activity, by boycotting events staged in Israel, or events sponsored by the Israeli government.

Academic and cultural boycott

In the UK the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine (www.bricup.org) has been set up in support of the Palestinian call. It is clear that Israel's academic institutions are integral to Israel's economy through their research and development work. They are indifferent to the daily attacks on the freedom of Palestinians to study, teach and research, and Ariel University has been implanted in the heart of the West Bank (see BirZeit University www.Right2Education.org). Students in Gaza, in particular, have been prevented from taking up university places abroad, or even in the West Bank

Academic and cultural boycott is a particularly



Palestinian students hold an impromptu seminar at an Israeli roadblock

powerful tool. As Professor Hilary Rose puts it: ‘the academic arena is to Israel what rugby football was to Apartheid South Africa.’

Other professional spheres, such as medicine and architecture, are also the focus of fierce debate.

“Planning, architecture and other construction disciplines are being used to promote an apartheid system of environmental control,” say British architects who have established Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine (www.apjp.org), that monitors and publicises the colonisation of Palestinian land. They say that architects, planners and engineers working on Israeli projects in the Occupied Territories are “complicit in social, political and economic oppression”, and “in violation of their professional code of ethics”.

In Israel, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR-Israel) protest against the denial of access to medical care to Palestinians, particularly those in Gaza, and against the use of torture — in which they claim Israeli doctors have been complicit. In the UK a group of doctors have brought these issues to the pages of the British Medical Journal and the Lancet, and have repeatedly called upon the Israeli Medical Association to investigate such cases, to no avail (see www.boycottima.org).

Sport

Solidarity groups worldwide have been challenging sporting events in which Israel competes.

In January 2009, an Israeli basketball team was met by hundreds of Turkish fans protesting over the violence in Gaza. Soon afterwards, the Tel Aviv Maccabi basketball team, playing in Barcelona, was greeted by a sea of Palestinian flags and the chant: “Boycott Israel, Viva Palestine”.

In February 2009 a Davis Cup tennis match, due to be played in Malmö, Sweden, seemed under threat when the local council expressed doubts about Israel's right to take part. It ended up being played without spectators.

In the field of sport Israel is treated like a member of the European Union — though it does not abide by the European Convention on Human Rights.

Progress

Israel's war on Gaza provoked a sea-change in public opinion, and generated a wave of support for boycott, divestment and sanctions. In April 2009 the Guardian reported that ‘Israeli companies are feeling the impact of boycott moves in Europe’. In December 2009 Defra (the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) confirmed it was an offence to label settlement goods ‘Produce of Israel’. Several supermarkets now refuse to stock such items. However there is evidence that a lot of mislabelling takes place; the only solution, legally and morally, is to avoid all Israeli goods.

Activists in Britain, Scotland and Ireland have also targeted local authorities and other large organisations signing contracts with firms complicit in Israel's occupation.

PSC also campaigns to halt the lucrative arms trade

between Israel and the UK. Britain is legally bound not to supply arms that will be used to oppress a civilian population, but the government admitted that British-made arms had been used during Israel's murderous attacks on Gaza. Export licenses for some of these armaments have since been revoked (see www.caat.org.uk), but the arms trade continues.

Divestment

PSC campaigns for British companies and shareholders to divest from Israel and for the government to suspend all trade agreements. Civil society organisations such as trade unions, women's institutes, ethical trading groups and co-ops, are asked to scrutinise their investments and pension funds, to make sure they are not implicated in supporting Israeli Apartheid.

■ In the UK, the Churches have given the moral lead in the divestment campaign. The campaign has focused on **Caterpillar**, the company that produces militarised bulldozers that destroy Palestinian homes, sometimes killing the inhabitants. The Methodist Conference has referred the matter to its Joint Advisory Committee for Ethical Investment and the General Synod of the Church of England recommended divestment from Caterpillar, in a principled stand.

■ Campaigns across the country and internationally have targeted contracts with **Veolia**, the French transport systems company. Because of its involvement in a tramway project serving illegal settlements near Jerusalem, it has lost millions in contracts, including ones worth £1 billion in Sandwell, West Midlands, 3.5 billion Euros in Sweden, and 750 million Euros in Bordeaux.

■ The biggest Swedish pension fund, **Foersta AP-Fonden** have barred Israeli arms maker **Elbit Systems** from its investment portfolios on ethical grounds because it operates a surveillance system for the illegally constructed Wall.

■ **Danske Bank**, the biggest financial group in Denmark, and **PKA Ltd**, one of the largest funds administering workers' pension funds have also divested from **Elbit** and from **Africa Israel**, which is involved in settlement construction. The latter has also been removed from the portfolio of the Dutch pension fund **PFZW**.

Trade union response

Many trade unions in Britain have already passed resolutions supporting Palestine, and some, including the largest unions, Unison and UNITE, supported a boycott. Following Israel's attack on Gaza, a wave of motions were passed in unions, calling for concrete action. The Scottish Trades Union Congress voted for pro-boycott policy in April 2009, and in September 2009 the Trades Union Congress (TUC), representing 6.5 million workers, voted for a boycott

focusing on settlement goods, working closely with the PSC. (Seventeen national unions are now affiliated to PSC – representing more than 80% of trade union members of the TUC.)



Members of the TUC voting in 2009

PSC has organised a number of trade union delegations to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory so that leading trade unionists can see for themselves the situation on the ground.

Hugh Lanning of the Public and Commercial Services Union said: **“Just as the movement against South African apartheid inspired a previous generation, the Palestinian struggle is inspiring a new generation to take action.”**

Trade unions in Ireland, Norway, Italy, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and most significantly South Africa, have also been very supportive of the rights of Palestinian workers. South African trade union COSATU has also passed resolutions supporting boycott.

Parliamentary support for sanctions

Sanctions are a crucial method of exerting governmental pressure on Israel. The Parliamentary International Development Committee said in 2004: ‘Where a sufficiently egregious case of human rights abuse has been established as to warrant sanctions, the EU should not be deterred from imposing them’.

MPs are increasingly critical of Israel's policies and, via Early Day Motions and debates, demand that the government take action. The House of Commons website gives information about the signatories of EDMs and the texts of debates: www.parliament.uk.

Members of the European Parliament are also actively pressing for action from the European Commission as well as the European Parliament.

“Until the Israeli government shows it is serious about complying with international law and joining the international community of law-abiding nations, the EU must apply economic pressure for it to do so.”

Dr Caroline Lucas MP

The role of the British public is crucial in lobbying MPs to press for trade sanctions, both nationally and within the EU.

BDS goes global

Europe is Israel's second largest export market after the US, worth 12 billion Euros; an estimated one third of these exports are fully or partially produced in the settlements. In February 2010, the **European Court of Justice** made the important ruling that goods made in West Bank settlements should not benefit from the favourable import taxes under the EU-Israel Association Agreement. **A key element of our BDS campaign is to have this Agreement suspended, as Israel violates the conditions attached to it on a daily basis.**

There are now coordinated actions such as that targeting Carmel-Agrexco, the main Israeli exporter of agricultural produce. In 2009 groups in the UK, Italy, France and Belgium called for the removal of the company's warehouses and offices from their countries.

In the 1980s a few financial institutions started to withdraw from Apartheid South Africa and a downward spiral was set in motion. South Africa became an unacceptable risk, both because of its own domestic turbulence, and because of the increasing pressure that finance houses were experiencing from clients, shareholders and the general public in their own countries.

Backing the Palestinian economy

It is almost impossible for fresh produce to be exported from the Occupied Territories as Israel's policy is to delay fruit, flowers and vegetables at road blocks so that they become unsaleable.

However, olive oil is exported and the voluntary organisation Zaytoun (www.zaytoun.org) sells it through retail outlets and volunteers in the UK.



Other non-perishable Palestinian products can be obtained via the following websites:

www.epcc-jerusalem.org; www.hadeel.org;
www.holyland-handicraft.org; www.jimmysbazaar.net;
www.olivecoop.com; www.palestineonlinestore.com;
www.palestinianpottery.com; www.taybehbeer.net

Visiting Palestine also helps to support the Palestinian economy. See www.travelpalestine.ps for all kinds of travel information.

Boycott from within

Within Israel there is a small but growing movement in support of the Palestinian call for boycott. Michael Warschawski, founder of the Alternative Information Centre in Israel, wrote in 2009 that the campaign was "in fact expressing the true and long-term interests of the Israeli people." He said that it would help people understand "that occupation and colonisation have a price, that violating the international rules may... make the State of Israel a pariah country."

Anti-racism

Israel attempts to present critics of its policies as anti-Semitic, in order to stifle debate. However, the movement for the rights of Palestinians is firmly based on anti-racist principles and the belief in peace with justice.

The Israeli organisation 'Boycott from Within' states: "A critical stance against the occupation, including explicit BDS actions taken by individuals and organisations, are not anti-Semitic. On the contrary, only resistance of this kind as part of the struggle for peace based on justice and equality will enable a common future for Arabs and Jews in the region."

Your actions can help bring about a just peace in the Middle East. Get involved!

Join the Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Join online: www.palestinecampaign.org
Or by phone on 020 7700 6192 or return this form.

- I wish to join the PSC and enclose
 £24 waged £12 unwaged
 I wish to help PSC's campaign and enclose
 £10 £25 £50 £.... other

Cheques payable to PSC.
Return to: PSC, BM Box PSA, London WC1N 3XX.
Phone: **020 7700 6192**
email: info@palestinecampaign.org

• See PSC's website www.palestinecampaign.org for fact sheets on other aspects of Israel's policies of occupation, house demolition, expulsion, land grab, targeted killings and imprisonment without trial



Name.....

Address.....

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..... Postcode.....

Tel.....

Email

• See the BIG website www.bigcampaign.org for more details of the campaign, including lists of Israeli products and firms complicit in the process of occupation and colonisation.