

Composite 35: Palestine

- 169.** Ireland/ Dublin Area Activists Committee
- 170.** Ireland/ 3-102 Branch
- 171.** London & Eastern/ 230 Central London Taxis Branch
- 172.** Scotland/ Edinburgh Area Activists Committee

This Policy Conference supports the right of the Palestinian people to national self-determination and to the creation of a viable and secure Palestinian state that coexists peacefully with Israel and so supports a negotiated settlement based on justice for the Palestinians.

This Conference is outraged at the continued human rights abuses being suffered by the Palestinian people. We particularly note the following:

- the continued occupation and destruction of Palestinian lands and Palestinian homes in breach of the Geneva Convention and numerous United Nations resolutions
- the continuation of mass arrests, of torture and of extra-judicial killings
- the horrific assaults on the population of Gaza and the West Bank – the frequent killings of civilians including on a mass scale; the enclosure of the people of Gaza and West Bank with razor wire and electrified fences, where they are subjected to frequent invasion and constant surveillance – including the sinister unmanned drones targeting for bombing raids, or the over-flights of ear-shattering jet fighters.
- the deliberate and illegal destruction of civilian infra-structure including electricity and water supplies
- the imposition of collective punishment, banned under international law, including the bulldozing of houses and industrial infrastructure
- the policy of ethnic cleansing designed to make life unbearable for all Palestinians under both Israeli and Palestinian authority - the on-going in-depth surveillance and control of the population including the forced division of families, and restrictions on free movement to deny them access to work, to education and to health-care – even in emergency situations such as child-birth
- the enforced bankruptcy of the Palestinian Authority and the impoverishment of the Palestinian People by the withholding of tax revenues; the impositions on the free movement of finance; the blocking of Palestinian exports and the blocking of international support and grant aid
- the continued building of the Apartheid Wall in defiance of the ruling of the International Court of Justice in the Hague, creating a series of ‘bantustans’ in the West Bank, fracturing families and communities, depriving Palestinians of their most productive land and water supplies and effectively annexing East Jerusalem into Israeli territory
- the continued building of illegal Israeli settlements, with the associated oppressive policing of the local population, the demolishing of Palestinian homes, the theft of land and water and the disruption of Palestinian infra-structure

Conference also notes that the British and Irish Governments and the European Union have failed in their obligations under International Law - in terms of the Geneva Convention, the UN and the International Court – to challenge the activities of the Israeli government. A reasonable response would be the imposition of political and economic sanctions. Instead it is the Palestinians who have been punished by the withholding of grant aid, whilst the criminal actions

of the Israeli state are further appeased by continuing to grant them preferential trading rights under Article 2 of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement. Conference notes that the European Union is formally obligated under the human rights clause in Article 2 to suspend the trading privileges enjoyed by Israel if it is in breach of human rights. The litany of human rights abuses, atrocities and war crimes should long ago have led to the ending of the agreement – indeed the European Parliament has already on two separate occasions called on the Council of Ministers to take this action.

Conference notes that, since the Israeli government's offensive on Gaza at the end of 2008, there has been an ongoing siege and blockade of Gaza, resulting in a worsening humanitarian crisis. This has left the population trapped, with restricted access to food, medical supplies and clean drinking water. Half a million people in Gaza are without running water, one million are without electricity, and there are acute food shortages.

Israel's indiscriminate land and aerial assault on the civilian population of Gaza saw over 1,400 Palestinians killed, half of them children, and over 5,000 people injured. It included the illegal use of white phosphorus bombs in built-up areas.

In Gaza, some 8,000 homes were destroyed during the Israeli attacks, 15 of Gaza's 27 hospitals were also destroyed. Some 50,000 people remain homeless. The ongoing blockade means that the population is denied the essential building and other materials necessary to address this crisis and rebuild essential infrastructure.

Despite wide international opposition, Israel's blockade of Gaza, imposed in June 2006 continues. The UN secretary general has called the blockade unsustainable and wrong and in October 2009, the UN Human Rights Council reprimanded Israel for its actions.

This conference:

- reiterates its deep concern at the humanitarian crisis in Gaza
- reiterates its call for an end to the blockade and for a re-opening of the crossings in and out of Gaza
- believes that the policy of isolation of the Gaza Strip has failed at both the political and humanitarian level

Unite welcomes the TUC General Council Statement of 2009 on Palestine that called on the British government to:

- condemn the Israeli military aggression and the continuing blockade of Gaza; end arms sales to Israel.
- seek EU agreement to impose a ban on the importing of goods produced in the illegal settlements;
- support moves to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

The TUC also pledged support for a consumer-led boycott of goods originating in the illegal settlements and for a campaign for disinvestment by companies associated with the occupation and with the building of the separation wall.

In pursuance of this motion UNITE will campaign in solidarity with the Palestinian people, and in recognition of the depths of oppression being suffered by them, Conference authorizes the Executive of UNITE to undertake the following:

- A. That the UNITE make direct representations to the European Council of Ministers to challenge the withholding of EU funding, and addressing the fact that the EU has failed in its obligations under international law to oppose the actions of Israel. UNITE also demands the ending of the preferential trading status enjoyed by Israel under the Euro-Med. Agreement.
- B. That UNITE could seek meetings with the British and Irish Ministers for Foreign Affairs and the British and Irish EU Commissioner to express our grave concerns about these issues, specifically to address the illegality of the Israeli actions, and to call for an appropriate and effective response.
- C. That the representatives of UNITE raise these issues at the forthcoming TUC conference and with the European TUC, and call upon concerted EU-wide trade union solidarity action to protest at the indifference of EU governments, at the failure of the strategy of 'constructive engagement' with the state of Israel, and at what is effectively the appeasement of the Israeli aggression and territorial expansionism.
- D. To actively and vigorously promote a policy of divestment from Israeli companies recognising that it is one of the most effective ways to ensure that the Israeli government is made aware of the extent of opposition to its crimes against humanity. UNITE will encourage companies to apply a policy of ethical investment in terms of pension fund holdings, and seek to ensure that investments are therefore withdrawn from Israeli companies as well as companies such as Caterpillar and Irish Cement Roadholdings that directly support the Israeli occupation and destruction of Palestinian land. UNITE members will also be encouraged to use whatever influence they can bring to bear on employers in both the private and state sector to apply such a policy of ethical investment.
- E. To actively and vigorously promote a boycott of Israeli goods and services similar to the boycott of South African goods during the era of apartheid. UNITE will proactively support such a boycott policy by working with other trade unions and NGOs on a program of educational activities, by a media campaign and by working alongside human rights and humanitarian relief organisations.
- F. That the solidarity links between the British, Irish, Palestinian and Israeli Labour movements be strengthened by a delegation from UNITE to the occupied areas. UNITE will also invite Palestinian trade union representatives to visit Britain and Ireland to encourage greater awareness of the situation in Palestine today, and to support the call for divestment, boycott and sanctions.
- G. That the implementation of this motion be further strengthened by the formation of UNITE for Palestine solidarity group to work with Trade Union Friends of Palestine groups in the Republic of Ireland and with TUF in Northern Ireland and support and work with campaigns including the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and initiatives such as the Viva Palestina convoy. That UNITE hosts a UNITE for Palestine conference, with invited international speakers, to further develop trade union solidarity action.

Further, this conference calls on the Executive and TUC to:

- oppose Israeli military aggression and call for an immediate end to the blockade of Gaza
- end export trade guarantees to British companies trading with Israel
- demand Israel demolishes the so-called apartheid wall, stop the artificial stranglehold of the economy of the West Bank, and allow free movement of Palestinian civilians.