

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.'

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 land and water resources and setting up hundreds of checkpoints to stop Palestinians getting to work, school or hospital. The Jordan Valley has, in effect, been annexed to Israel.

■ Israel has almost completed an eight-metre high Apartheid Wall which snakes through the West Bank, isolating many Palestinian centres of population, including Bethlehem.

■ 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 siege; even basic necessities are denied entry. In the winter of 2008–2009, over 1400 Palestinians including more than 300 children were killed in three weeks of bombing and shelling by land, sea and air, condemned by the UN Goldstone report as war crimes.

■ In Israel itself the indigenous Palestinians are treated as second class citizens, and no refugees have been allowed to return to their homes.

A shameful silence

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 western government has taken any action.**

When he came to power, President Obama called for a halt on settlement building — but fell silent when Israel continued to announce expansions. **Israel naturally feels it can act with impunity. As our government won't apply pressure on Israel, 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”.

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: <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/>) – a move strongly opposed by many Israeli academics.

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

Increasingly, Israeli orchestras and theatrical companies that act as ambassadors for the state of Israel



Palestinian students hold an impromptu seminar at an Israeli roadblock

and that support their government’s policies – by, for example, playing to segregated audiences in the illegal settlements – find themselves unwelcome abroad. At the same time singers, writers, musicians and actors are refusing to appear in Israel, and academics are refusing to attend conferences. Universities and student unions in the US, S Africa, Canada, Sweden, Norway and Britain are organising debates on these issues, and calling for non-cooperation or boycott. For instance, Britain’s University and College Union (UCU) voted in 2007 to promote a boycott of Israeli academic institutions and called for freezing European funding for Israeli academic institutions.

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), who monitor and publicise the colonisation of Palestinian land. They say that architects, planners and engineers working on Israeli projects in the Occupied Territories are “in violation of their professional code of ethics” and should be called to account.

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 (see www.boycottima.org).

Sport

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.

Palestinian sportsmen and women in the Occupied Territories find it extremely difficult to meet, in order to train and compete, due to the harsh restrictions on movement imposed by Israel. Solidarity groups worldwide have therefore been challenging sporting events in which Israel competes, and pressing for Israel’s exclusion until it changes its policies. International soccer players like Eric Cantona and Frédéric Kanouté and organisations such as Show Racism the Red Card, FIFpro and UEFA all protested at the imprisonment without charge of the Palestinian footballer Mahmoud Sarsak, on hunger strike for over 85 days, until he was promised release.

Progress

Israel’s repeated aggressions have had a major impact on public opinion and generated a wave of support for boycott, divestment and sanctions.

In December 2009 Defra (the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) confirmed it was an offence to label settlement goods ‘Produce of Israel’.

Most 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. In April 2012 the **Co-op** decided to expand its boycott of settlement goods to a complete boycott of all Israeli companies sourcing any goods in the settlements.

Carmel-Agrexco, Israel's major exporter of settlement produce, went bankrupt in 2011 after a long campaign exposing its activities, while the cosmetics company **Ahava** had to close its flagship store in Covent Garden following protests about the illegal sources of its products.

Local authorities and other large organisations have been divesting from or refusing to use firms complicit in Israel's occupation. After heavy campaigning the West London Waste Authority was persuaded not to sign contracts worth many millions with **Veolia**, a company involved in providing transport services to the illegal settlements. This followed the loss of a £1 billion contract with Sandwell in the West Midlands, and contracts worth 3.5 billion Euros in Sweden and 750 million Euros in Bordeaux. **Eden Springs**, which takes its mineral water from the Golan Heights, has also been successfully targeted.

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.

A recent campaign focuses on the security firm **G4S**, heavily involved in 'security' arrangements for the settlements and in prisons where Palestinians are held, often without charge or trial.

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, one focus has been **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, while the General Synod of the Church of England recommended divestment from Caterpillar.

■ The biggest Swedish pension fund, **Foersta APFonden** has 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**.

■ **Sanctions** are a crucial method of exerting governmental pressure on Israel. Thanks to the campaigning of constituents, 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 House of Lords are also active in debating these issues, and have visited the Occupied Territories as part of PSC delegations.

■ Groups of lobbyists from around Europe are constantly bringing the plight of the Palestinians to the attention of their MEPs, to elicit action from the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Trade union response

Following Israel's attack on Gaza in 2008-9, a wave of motions were passed in unions, calling for concrete action.

The Irish Congress of Trades Unions launched a boycott of Israeli goods in February 2009, followed in April by the Scottish Trades Union Congress who voted in pro-boycott policy.

In September 2009 the Trades Union Congress (TUC), representing 6.5 million workers, voted to work closely with PSC for a boycott campaign focussing on settlement goods. They are also putting hard questions to their opposite number in Israel, the Histadrut, who support Israel's racist policies.



Members of the TUC voting in 2009

BDS in Europe

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.

(17 national unions are now affiliated to PSC — representing more than 80% of trade union members of the TUC.)

Hugh Lanning, Deputy General Secretary 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 Norway, Italy, Canada, New Zealand and Australia have also been very supportive of the rights of Palestinian workers. Above all, the South African trade union COSATU has passed a number of strong motions supporting boycott, divestment and sanctions.

Israel reacts

The creation of very well-funded propaganda organisations (Bicom, Just Journalism, Honest Reporting), penetration of the media, intimidation of journalists and attempts to smear campaigners with the label of anti-Semitism all show that the campaigns of awareness-raising and of boycott are working. PSC was proud to hear that the Reut Institute – an advisory body to the Israeli government – believes that ‘London stands out as a hub of delegitimisation’ and that PSC is a major ‘catalyst’ within that hub.

In July 2011 the Israeli parliament passed the “Law for Prevention of Damage to the State of Israel through Boycott”, which aims at silencing criticism or dissent.

In June 2012 the Israeli Embassy in London hosted a two-day conference for 150 lawyers from around the world to discuss ways of combating the growing global BDS movement.

Boycott from within

Within Israel there is a small but growing movement in support of the Palestinian call for Boycott (see, for example, boycottisrael.info)

and www.whoprofits.org, which exposes the activities of companies involved in the Occupation).

The Israeli organisation ‘Boycott from Within’ states:

“A critical stance against the occupation, including explicit BDS actions taken by individuals and organisations, is 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.”

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.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.



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 factsheets 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.