



Press Release
-For Immediate Release -
The Struggle Continues!
The Boycotting Israeli Apartheid Conference Opens in Toronto
Oct 6-8, 2006

The Struggle Continues: Boycotting Israeli Apartheid Conference, which opens this evening, is a response to a call made by 171 Palestinian civil-society organizations in July 2005 for the international community to implement a comprehensive Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) strategy against apartheid Israel as the focal point of solidarity efforts with the Palestinian people.

Israel is an apartheid state that shares many features of South African apartheid. “We are not using the term apartheid metaphorically, or as a vague analogy; Israel’s treatment of Palestinians corresponds to the legal definition of apartheid as articulated by the UN and the International Criminal Court,” explains Navyug Gill, spokesperson for the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid, the group convening the conference. Palestinian citizens of Israel are denied the right to control and develop land in over 90% of that area because they are Palestinian. Palestinians expelled in 1948 and 1967 are denied the right to return to their homes and lands, despite the fact that anyone of Jewish background has the automatic right to become an Israeli citizen. In the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinians live under separate and discriminatory military law, and their mobility, education, health and work.

Through the operation of checkpoints, Israeli-only highways, and an internationally condemned Apartheid Wall, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been confined to open-air prisons akin to apartheid South Africa's Bantustans. “The Wall scythes through the landscape as it nears completion, forming part of an intricate system of control with the fortified settler-only roads to steal 48% of lands in the West Bank. Palestinians in Gaza, 80% of whom are refugees from the lands they were expelled from in 1948, are imprisoned behind two Walls,” explains Jamal Juma’, coordinator of the Stop the Wall Campaign in Palestine.

“A dependent Bantustan alongside an apartheid state is a mockery of self-determination—as it existed in apartheid South Africa and now in apartheid Israel,” says Salim Vally, chair of the Palestine Solidarity Committee of South Africa. “As South Africans, we realize that we will never be free until Palestine and Palestinians are free.”

Responding to Israel’s assaults on Gaza in a speech last July, Willie Madisha, recently re-elected president of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), stated: “Israel continues to kill innocent women and children with the ruthlessness that even we did not see during the erstwhile apartheid S.A.” Two weeks ago, COSATU’s national congress expressed support for an international BDS campaign and unanimously passed a motion calling on its members “to boycott Israeli goods and to demonstrate at the embassies of the U.S. and Israel.”

The Canadian government provides extensive political and economic support to Israeli apartheid. “Canadian corporations profit through investments and joint operations with

Israeli companies. Canada and Israel have a Free Trade agreement called CIFTA, and the province of Ontario recently negotiated a trade agreement with Israel. Some of the organizations playing a central role in the implementation of apartheid on the land of Palestine, such as the Jewish National Fund, have charitable status in Canada,” says Khaled Mouammar, a CAIA spokesperson. "The Canadian government has long provided diplomatic support for Israel. The Harper government's unequivocal backing of Israeli aggression in Gaza and Lebanon this summer is just the most recent example,” adds Gill.

The Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid is calling for Canadian economic, political, military, cultural and institutional support for Israel to be cut off. "We are calling for BDS until Israel recognizes the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and complies with its obligations under international law,” says Mouammar.

The BDS campaign is international in scope. “We have called a day of action tomorrow, October 7, focusing on the boycott of Israeli goods. Actions are planned in over 20 cities throughout the UK,” says Betty Hunter, General Secretary of the London-based Palestine Solidarity Campaign, who will join Juma’, Vally, and over 30 other speakers presenting at the conference.

In Canada and Quebec, the boycott has already begun. Last May, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE-Ontario) passed a resolution in support of a BDS campaign explicitly targeting Israeli apartheid. The Quebec-based Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine (CJPP), which includes a number of Quebec labour unions, also passed a BDS motion at the beginning of the year. And the United Church of Canada’s Toronto conference, which represents some 300 congregations in Ontario, joined the BDS campaign in June.

The Struggle Continues: Boycotting Israeli Apartheid Conference will provide a forum for different sectors – including campus groups, unions, artists, community and faith-based organizations – to come together to build a common strategy. “We hope that this conference will build on the momentum created by the CUPE Ontario resolution endorsing a BDS campaign last May,” says Gill. “It will bring us a major step forward in our effort to build a national boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign capable of challenging Israeli apartheid and Canadian support for it.”

Adds Jamal Juma’: “The facts on the ground in Palestine are there for all to see. We need action. We need political pressure on the Occupation. We need freedom.”

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