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Palestinian BDS National Committee marks five years of Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions

Occupied Palestine, 9 July 2010 – On the fifth anniversary of the Palestinian Civil Society Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with international law and Palestinian rights,[1] the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) warmly salutes all our local and international partners and supporters, individuals and organizations, who have contributed to the establishment and spectacular growth of what is now a truly global movement for accountability and upholding international law. We call upon all people of conscience to respond to continued Israeli impunity by joining the movement and taking visible and effective BDS actions. After five years of BDS, the movement has proven, indisputably, to be the most effective and morally consistent form of solidarity with the people of Palestine in our struggle to end Israel's occupation, apartheid, and persistent denial of the UN-sanctioned right of return for the Palestinian refugees.

Inspired by the South African struggle against apartheid, the BDS movement is rooted in a century-long tradition of Palestinian civil and popular struggle for freedom, justice and human. In 2005, in light of the complete failure of the UN and the so-called international community to hold Israel accountable for its continuous impunity and violations of international law, and after one year of silence following the historic ruling of the International Court of Justice,[2] Palestinian civil society appealed to citizens of the world to shoulder the moral responsibility to end complicity in Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian rights. The BDS Call asserts the primacy of the right to self-determination and addresses the fundamental rights of the three main components of the Palestinian people: to live free from Israeli occupation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; to end Israel's system of institutionalized racial discrimination against its Palestinian citizens and for the Palestinian refugees and internally displaced, the great majority of the Palestinian people, to exercise their UN-sanctioned right to return to their homes of origin and to receive reparations.

Based on progressive, anti-racist principles, the **BDS Call** has in the five years since it was issued and endorsed by a clear majority of Palestinian civil society led to the creation of a vibrant, context-sensitive, rapidly expanding movement highly capable of taking visible and effective actions that raise awareness, speak truth to power, and put pressure on Israel and the states, companies and institutions that are complicit with its three-tiered system of oppression. The following are but some of the global BDS movement's achievements in the last five years.

Consumer boycotts have allowed individual consumers to show their opposition to Israel's oppression through collective action. Adopting creative forms of protest, these boycotts have so far led to a number of major retailers to review their sale of Israeli produce:

- Italian supermarkets COOP and Nordiconad[3] and British supermarkets Marks and Spencer and Co-operative Group[4] have all announced that they will cease to sell produce from illegal Israeli settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territory.

- On 30 March 2010, campaigners all over the world took part in a **Global Day of BDS Action**, holding inventive, visible and successful protest actions outside and inside shops that sell Israeli products.[5]

The academic boycott,[6] arguably the most challenging of all forms of boycott, has widely spread the debate on the entrenched complicity of Israeli academic institutions in planning, justifying and perpetuating the state's colonial and apartheid policies, including its war crimes in Gaza, Jerusalem and beyond.[7] The academic boycott campaign has highlighted the role played by Israeli academic institutions and led to the termination of some forms of collaboration:

- The May 2010 Congress of the British University and College Union (UCU) made history by voting to boycott the "University Center of Ariel in Samaria" (AUCS), an Israeli colony-college in Occupied Palestinian Territory, and to sever all relations with Histadrut, the racist Israeli labor body that is a key pillar of the Israeli state's apartheid policies.

- University workers in the Canadian Union of Public Employees passed a motion calling for an academic boycott of Israel in February 2009. Academics also vowed to pressure their academies to break financial relationships with Israel.[8]

- Aside from the UK, there are active academic boycott campaigns now in the US, France, Spain, Italy, and others.[9]

By refusing to provide a cultural cover up for Israeli apartheid, **artists and cultural institutions** have sent a clear message to Israel that its occupation and discrimination against Palestinians is unacceptable. Far from being "above politics," Israeli cultural institutions play a key role in the "Brand Israel" campaign of the Israeli foreign ministry, boosting the state's image and whitewashing its colonial policies and war crimes. Today there are campaigns for the cultural boycott of Israel in the US, Britain, France, Italy, Spain, South Africa, Australia, Germany, Belgium, Canada, Norway, among others. Successes include:

- In the wake of the Flotilla attack, Klaxons and Gorillaz Sound System cancelled their scheduled concerts in Israel,[10] reportedly due to the Flotilla attack, and so did the Pixies.[11] Most significantly, Hollywood superstars **Meg Ryan and Dustin Hoffman** cancelled their attendance at the 2010 Jerusalem Film Festival following the Flotilla Attack.[12]

- In other developments related to the Flotilla, world best-selling writer, the Swedish Henning Mankell, who was on the Freedom Flotilla when attacked, called for South-Africa style global sanctions against Israel in response to its brutality,[13] and world renowned British writer, Iain Banks, wrote in the Guardian that the best way for international artists, writers and academics to

“convince Israel of its moral degradation and ethical isolation” is “simply by having nothing more to do with this outlaw state.”[14]

- In the weeks before the Flotilla attack, artists of the caliber of **Elvis Costello, Gil Scott-Heron and Carlos Santana** all cancelled scheduled performances in Israel after receiving appeals from Palestinian and international BDS groups.[15]

- Added to these are cultural figures, such as John Berger, Ken Loach, Judith Butler, Naomi Klein, The Yes-Men, Sarah Schulman, Aharon Shabtai, Udi Aloni, Adrienne Rich and John Williams, who explicitly support the Palestinian cultural boycott of Israel; cultural figures who refused to participate in Israel’s official cultural events for political reasons such as Augusto Boal, Roger Waters, Andre Brink, Vincenzo Consolo, and Nigel Kennedy; and cultural figures such as Bono, U2, Bjork, Jean-Luc Godard, Snoop Dogg, and others who decline offers to take part in events in Israel or agree then cancel without giving explicit political reasons.[16]

- Principled and determined protests have taken place when officially sponsored or supported Israeli cultural performing groups, such as the Jerusalem Quartet, the Israel Ballet or the Batsheva Dance Company, perform overseas in an attempt to whitewash Israeli violations of international law.[17]

Similarly, international sporting events can play an important role in shaping a country's image in the rest of the world. A few initiatives relating to a sporting boycott of Israel have generated significant awareness of Israeli violation of Palestinian rights:

- Following Israel’s attack on the Freedom Flotilla, the Turkish under-19 football team refused to participate in a match with Israel and the Swedish under-21 team applied to FIFA to be allowed to do the same.[18]

- Sevilla striker Frederic Kanoute received a fine from the Spanish football federation for revealing a T-shirt expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people during a match.[19]

Divestment initiatives encourage and pressure individuals, financial institutions and companies to shed their investments in Israel in order to curb the profits of Israel’s war and apartheid economy. Divestment campaigns have had a number of important victories:

- French public services contractor **Veolia** is reported to be trying to pull out of its contract to help manage the Jerusalem Light Rail, a rail system that serves to cement Israel’s colonial hold on occupied East Jerusalem and will help transport illegal settlers living in the Occupied West Bank, after city councils in Stockholm, Dublin, Galway, Sligo and Swansea barred the company from future contracts and a number of private banks divested their shares in the company.[20]

- In May of this year, Global financial giant Deutsche Bank divested from **Elbit Systems**,[21] an Israeli arms company that supplies the Israeli military and provides components for the Apartheid Wall in Occupied Palestinian Territory, following similar decisions taken by Foersta AP-Fonden, Sweden’s largest pension fund,[22] the Norwegian State Pension fund, Norwegian

insurer KLP, Danish financial watchdog Danwatch, Denmark's Danske Bank and ABP, one of the largest Dutch pension funds.[23]

Sanctions should be an essential part of upholding international law and holding states accountable for gravely violating it. Some states have already taken up vanguard positions, and a number of states reacted strongly and decisively following the Flotilla attack:

- Bolivia and Venezuela cut ties with Israel, shutting down Israeli embassies in their countries, Qatar and Mauritania froze ties with Israel, and Jordan recalled its ambassador as an act of protest against Israeli assault on the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip in 2008-09.[24]
- Following the attack on the Freedom Flotilla, Nicaragua suspended its diplomatic relations with Israel,[25] South Africa recalled its ambassador to Tel Aviv,[26] while Norway's minister of education Kristin Halvorsen, reiterated Norway's arms ban on Israel and called all other states to "follow the Norwegian position which excludes trading arms with Israel." [27] Turkey recalled its ambassador to Tel Aviv, and the Turkish Parliament called on the government to "revise the political, military and economic relations with Israel".[28]
- In addition, Ariel College was excluded from a prestigious university competition about sustainable architecture organized by the Spanish Government in September 2009.[29]

The global trade union movement has consistently demonstrated its courage and commitment to human rights by adopting concrete, ground-breaking labor-led sanctions against oppressive regimes in a show of effective solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world. Adopting BDS measures has become the most prominent form of trade union solidarity with the Palestinian civil society in general, and the Palestinian working class in particular:

- The Scottish, Irish and South African Trade Union congresses have all firmly and resolutely endorsed BDS, including reviewing relations with the Histadrut. The endorsements of these national federations mirror the actions of scores of individual unions.
- Trade unions, especially **dockworkers unions**, around the world heeded the Palestinian trade union movement's appeal of June 8, 2010,[30] that called for taking effective and concrete measures to block Israel's maritime trade in response to its massacre human rights activists aboard the Freedom Flotilla. The Swedish Dockworkers union blocked more than 500 containers weighing approximately 500 tons during a week-long blockade of exports to Israel and Israeli goods that commenced on 23 June.[31] The Local 10 branch of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) in California, USA passed a motion in support of industrial action and respected a labour and community picket by refusing to unload an Israeli cargo ship for twenty-four hours,[32] subsequently refusing to allow an Israeli Consulate delegation to address a meeting of the union.[33][34] The Turkish Liman-Is Union, the Norwegian Dockworkers Unions and the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (SATAWU) – which pioneered the boycott against Israeli maritime trade in February 2009 by refusing to offload a ship in Durban in protest of Israel's war of aggression on the Gaza Strip - also announced planned blockades.[35] The trade unions in Cochin Port, India, have been refusing to unload Israeli ships since 23 June.

· In other developments related to the Flotilla Attack, the Belgian trade union federation (FGTB) adopted a strong BDS position;^[36] the British union UNISON suspended relations with the Histadrut;^[37] the largest British union, UNITE, reaffirmed its support for BDS;^[38] and the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) decided to launch a campaign to make every municipality in South Africa an “Apartheid Israel free zone”.^[39]

In a historic development in December 2009, prominent Christian Palestinian leaders released the Moment of Truth - **Kairos Palestine document**, calling on churches around the world “to say a word of truth and to take a position of truth with regard to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land.” Unambiguously endorsing BDS as one of the key non-violent forms of solidarity that international faith-based organizations are urged to adopt, the document affirms: “We see boycott and disinvestment as tools of justice, peace and security”. This has led to a number of important actions by faith based groups:

· The **UK Methodist Church** voted in June 2010 to endorse the Kairos Palestine document and implement a boycott of produce from illegal Israeli colonial settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territory.^[40]

· The Middle East Study Committee of the General Assembly of the **US Presbyterian Church** has released a report recommending that the US Presbyterian Church endorses the Kairos Palestine document and take appropriate action.^[41]

In reviewing the successes of the BDS movement, it is evident that the **2005 Palestinian Civil Society Call** is increasingly being answered today by mainstream and powerful actors. Cultural superstars, global financial institutions, major trade unions, faith groups, political parties, governments and individuals of conscience of every kind are beginning to take action. Our global movement is beginning to isolate Israel. The BNC warmly salutes and wishes to thank each and every individual who has played a role, however small, in the development of this movement for justice and equal rights.

BDS shows the way for translating words into deeds and emotional support for justice into actions that can truly end injustice. In five years, the Palestinian-led BDS movement has achieved far beyond what the South African anti-apartheid struggle had in many more years, according to first hand accounts from leaders of that struggle. In the next five years, the BNC hopes that the Palestinian people will start seeing the light at the end of the long, dark Israeli tunnel of occupation, apartheid and denial of refugee rights. Given all the commitment, creativity, networking, planning skills and principled advocacy of universal human rights and international law that BDS activists and partners around the world have demonstrated, this aspiration is gradually being realized. Keep hope alive! Intensify BDS!

[1] <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/52>

[2] The ICJ Advisory Opinion stated: "all States are under an obligation not to recognize the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by such construction."
<http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?pr=71&code=mwp&p1=3&p2=4&p3=6&ca...>

[3] <http://www.stopagrexcoitalia.org/comunicati/141-boycott-objective-is-res...>

[4] http://www.bigcampaign.org/index.php?page=who_sells_israeli_goods

[5] <http://www.bdsdayofaction.net>

[6] For more on academic boycott, see www.PACBI.org, the website of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI)

[7] For studies on academic complicity, see, for instance, the SOAS Palestine Society Report: "Tel Aviv University part and parcel of the Israeli Occupation," <http://www.electronicintifada.net/downloads/pdf/090708-soas-palestine-society.pdf> and Keller, U. (2009), the Academic Boycott of Israel and the Complicity of Israeli Academic Institutions in Occupation of Palestinian Territories. The Economy of the Occupation: A Socioeconomic Bulletin: Alternative Information Centre.

http://www.alternativenews.org/images/stories/downloads/Economy_of_the_o...

[8] <http://www.thestar.com/News/GTA/article/591429>

[9] For details of academic boycott developments in 2009, for example, see: <http://www.pacbi.org/pdfs/PACBI%20Newsletter1-BDS-2009-Highlights-3-Jan-...>

[10] <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/klaxons-and-gorillaz-sound-system-c...>

[11] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/06/06/2919568.htm?section=justin>

[12] <http://www.jpost.com/Home/Article.aspx?id=178540>

[13] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/palestinianauthorit...>

[14] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jun/03/boycott-israel-iain-banks>

[15] <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11319.shtml>

[16] http://www.pacbi.org/printnews.php?id=1291#_edn8

[17] <http://www.creative-i.info/2010/03/30/jerusalem-quartet-london-concert-d...>

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<http://stopthewall.org/worldwideactivism/1874.shtml>

[18] <http://www.thenation.com/blog/flotilla-fallout-are-teams-right-refuse-pl...>

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<http://svenskfotboll.se/arkiv/svensk-fotboll/2010/05/uefa-ser-inget-hind...>

[19] <http://english.aljazeera.net/sport/2009/01/200918152344764876.html>

[20] <http://cosmos.ucc.ie/cs1064/jabowen/IPSC/ipsc/displayRelease.php?releaseID=335>

<http://www.corporatewatch.org/?lid=3474>

http://www.scottishpsc.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&...

[21] <http://stopthewall.org/latestnews/2275.shtml>

- [22] http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=50a_1270122673&c=1
- [23] <http://corporateoccupation.wordpress.com/2010/02/25/%E2%80%9Cwave-of-div...>
- [24] <http://www.badil.org/en/al-majdal/item/19-bds-update-january-june2009>
- [25] <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-3897773.00.html>
- [26] http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?sid=a_vBbjBZJ6LM&pid=20601087
- [27] <http://www.swedishwire.com/nordic/4809-norway-calls-for-boycott-on-arms-...>
- [28] <http://www.news-gazette.com/news/news/2010-06-02/turkeys-parliament-want...>
- [29] http://aljazeera.com/news/articles/34/Spain_Boycotts_Ariel_College_for_B...
- [30] <http://bdsmovement.net/?q=node/712>
- [31] <http://www.labournet.net/docks2/1006/sweden6.html>
- [32] http://www.mercurynews.com/ci_15340836?nclink_check=1
- [33] <http://www.labournet.net/docks2/1007/oakland1.html>
- [34] http://pd.cpim.org/2010/0704_pd/07042010_7.html
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<http://www.labournet.net/world/0902/cosatu3.html>
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