

PHILLY BDS

A Coalition for Justice and Human Rights in Israel-Palestine

TO: The Strauss Group, c/o Sabra Dipping Co., L.L.C.

SUBJECT: Strauss Group violations of corporate responsibility

DATE: August 27, 2010

As a coalition of Philadelphia area organizations working for human rights, social justice, and peace in Israel-Palestine, we are appalled by The Strauss Group's financial support of the Israel Defense Forces, particularly the Golani Brigade. The Strauss Group is facilitating activities that directly violate international law and U.S. foreign policy, actively promote racial discrimination, support brutal Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilians, and contribute to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. We urge The Strauss Group to adhere to standards of corporate social responsibility that prohibit support for violations of international law and human rights. We request that The Strauss Group reconsider its policies, and withdraw support for the IDF and the Golani Brigade.

Sabra Dipping Company's Mediterranean food products are the most widely distributed Strauss product as well as the largest selling hummus in the United States. As concerned U.S. citizens, we insist that proceeds from the sale of your products in our country be consistent with U.S. foreign policy, as well as the principles of the Geneva Convention, human rights and international law. Currently they are not.

Documentation regarding the human rights and international law violations committed by the Israeli military over the past 60 years is abundant. Historically, the Israeli army has been a consistent violator of human rights and international law. A report submitted by IDF Military Advocate General Avichai Mandelblit to the United Nations two weeks ago regarding Israel's conduct during Operation Cast Lead confirms the key findings of the Goldstone Report.

Even by the abysmal standards of the Israeli army, Israel's "elite" Golani Brigade has a history of severe human rights abuses against Palestinian and Lebanese people. According to the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, the Golani Brigade "is known as a brigade that struggles with no small number of disciplinary problems and scandals, caused by bad behavior ranging from revolts against commanders to abuse of Palestinians."

Yigal Amir, the right-wing extremist who assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, was a member of the Golani Brigade. A 1995 *New York Times* article on the Golani Brigade reported, "One day reporters came upon some of them [Golani Brigades] in a Palestinian village near Bethlehem, dragging youths into a bus packed with soldiers beating their clubs on the steel seat frames in unison and chanting wildly: 'We are Golani! We are insane!'... 'In Golani, everybody hits,' Mr. Amir's comrade, Mr. Nagar remembered." The *Times* article noted that, in addition to Amir, "Three men who had served in Golani have committed widely publicized murders of Arabs and an Israeli peace campaigner."

Breaking the Silence, an organization of veteran Israeli soldiers, collects testimonies of soldiers who served in the Occupied Territories during the Second Intifada. Soldiers who serve in the Territories are witness to and participate in military actions which change them immensely. Cases of abuse towards Palestinians, looting, and destruction of property have been the norm for years, but are still excused as military necessities, or explained as extreme and unique cases. The soldiers' testimonies portray a different and grim picture of questionable orders in many areas regarding Palestinian civilians. They attest to the depth of corruption which is spreading in the Israeli military. Breaking the Silence has documented numerous cases of Golani Brigade involvement in human rights abuses. For example, in November 2008 members of the Golani Brigade filmed themselves forcing a captive, blindfolded Palestinian to sing humiliating songs, some of a sexual nature, including some celebrating the Golani Brigade itself.

The director of the Israeli Human Rights organization B'Tselem, Jessica Montell, recently said "As long as Israel controls millions of Palestinians, it must also safeguard their rights. The ongoing occupation both violates many of those rights, and poses clear dangers for Israel's democracy. For this reason we, as Israelis, must demand accountability for actions taken in our name in the Occupied Territories and work to change in policies that infringe human rights."

Human Rights Watch noted in a detailed 2005 report, *Promoting Impunity*, "The Israeli military has fostered a climate of impunity in its ranks by failing to thoroughly investigate whether soldiers have killed and injured Palestinian civilians unlawfully or failed to protect them from harm... Israeli forces have killed or seriously injured thousands of Palestinians who were not taking part in the hostilities. However, the Israeli authorities have investigated fewer than five percent of the fatal incidents to determine whether soldiers were responsible for using force unlawfully. The investigations they did conduct fell far short of international standards for independent and impartial inquiries." Human Rights Watch further explains that, "The individual human rights abuses that characterize ethnic cleansing are crimes against humanity and war crimes."

The Israeli military enforces a discriminatory, apartheid system. For example, in the West Bank the army is directly involved in the seizure of Palestinian land to build colonial settlements for Jews only as well as Israel's wall, all in violation of international law. Palestinian communities which have conducted long nonviolent campaigns to prevent the seizure of their land like Bil'in, Budrus, Biddu, Beit Liqya, Al Zawiyya, Jayyous and Um Salomona, have suffered ten deaths and hundreds of injuries at the hands of the military.

We call upon Strauss to cease its support of the IDF and the Golani Brigade, and to endorse the "Boycott From Within" in which Palestinians, Jews, citizens of Israel, and members of the global community join the Palestinian call for a Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign against Israel. Together we call for: an end to the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza; dismantling of the "separation barrier;" recognition of the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinians citizens of Israel to full equity; and respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

Corporations have a responsibility to uphold human rights and international law. In light of the Israeli military's longstanding and repeated failure to respect accepted laws and norms, we call on The Strauss Group to withdraw public and financial support of the Israel Defense Forces and specifically The Golani Brigade and to join the Boycott From Within.

Signed,

Philadelphia BDS Coalition, phillybds@gmail.com

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Philadelphia Jews for a Just Peace